GMA wants Naia 3 opened before May elections

Story on PAGE A2

No trace of boat with 70 on board

By Jofelle P. Tesorio
PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

PUERTO PRINCESA CITY—Navy rescue boats and Air Force search planes yesterday found no trace of a motor launch carrying more than 70 passengers and crewmen, a day after the small vessel radioed that it was taking on wa-

NO TRACE/ A9

PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

WHAT'S INSIDE

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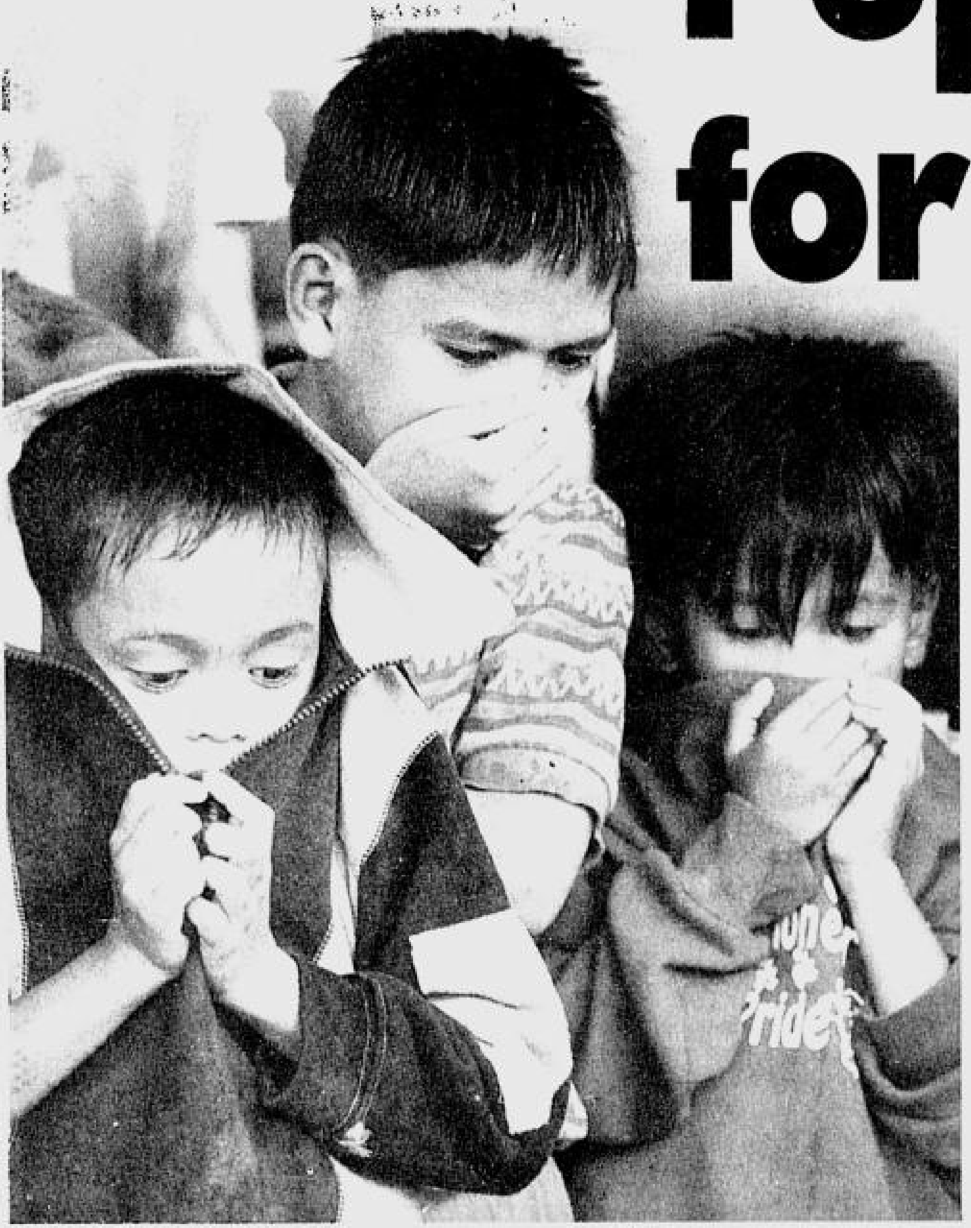
email: feedback@inquirer.com.ph Tuesday, December 23, 2003 ★★ 42 pages / 4 sections / vol. 19 / no. 15 P15 website: www.inq7.net

Pope: Let's pray for Leyte victims



THE STENCH of death is too much for these boys who watch rescuers dig for bodies of landslide victims in Liloan, Southern Leyte. EDWIN BACASMAS

Death toll in tragedy nears 200

By Blanche S. Rivera, Jani Arnaiz and Jhunnex Napallacan

POPE John Paul II has asked the country's rescue workers and all those giving assistance to the victims of the landslides and floods in Leyte and northeastern Mindanao to "persevere in their efforts to bring relief and support."

In an "urgent message of compassion" sent to the Philippines through Papal Nuncio Antonio Franco yesterday, the Pope said he was "deeply saddened" by the tragedy that has claimed the lives of close to 200 people.

The Pope assured the victims that he was praying for mercy for the the souls of the departed, and for strength and comfort for those who were injured.

The message was signed by the Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano and sent directly from Rome.

"This message means that John Paul II has a genuine affection for the Philippines and the Filipinos. He has reacted to every crisis we've had ... His concern and prayers really mean something," Fr. James Reuter, spokesperson of the Nuncio, said.

Even as rescuers struggled to recover more bodies, the Coast Guard reported yesterday that a passenger ferry carrying more than 70 people went missing. Naval reconnaissance aircraft have so far failed to locate the vessel or any survivors. *(See story at the top of this page.)*

Panaon Island, which lies near the southern tip of Leyte and is inhabited by some 50,000 impoverished coconut farmers, accounted for 170 of the 191 deaths so far after the landslides and floods that hit on Friday night and Saturday.

The list of fatalities also includes victims

POPE/ A8

DENR says roots of disaster beyond anyone's control

By Volt Contrearas and Norman Bordadora

EXCESSIVE rainfall, ancient fault lines and the widespread conversion of forests to farm lands decades before the country had anti-illegal logging laws made up the deadly combination that led to last weekend's massive flooding and landslides in Southern Leyte and northeastern Mindanao, environment officials said yesterday.

Environment Secretary Elisea Gozun practically absolved her staff in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources of any responsibility in the tragedy, saying "the aggravating factors were beyond anyone's control."

"It's not the time for finger-pointing," she said at a press conference at the DENR's main office in Quezon City, when asked if any official, including those in local government, would face investigation for possible negligence.

While admitting that deforestation in the affected municipalities was "one of the factors" in the disaster, Gozun explained this was due "not to illegal logging but to land conversion," which was perfectly legal at the time it was carried out.

DENR/ A9

IT'S SHOWTIME for actor Fernando Poe Jr. who trains his sights on next year's elections as the standard-bearer of the opposition Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino. JESS YUSON

FPJ accepts draft of opposition bloc

By Christine O. Avendaño

WITHOUT fanfare, without drama, and without any politicians in tow, movie actor Fernando Poe Jr. yesterday accepted the nomination of the Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino to be its standard-bearer for the May 2004 elections.

The coalition of opposition parties had drafted Poe on Dec. 10, in his absence, at a big gathering at the Hotel Intercontinental in Makati City.

Yesterday, in a brief news conference at the Westin Philippine Plaza in Pasay City, Poe said he had accepted the nomination.

"*Lubos na ikinararangal ko at pinagmamalaki ko, ako, si* Fernando Poe Jr., *ay buong pagpapakumbaba kong kinikilala at tinatanggap ang maging* presidential standard-bearer *sa bandila ng KNP* (I am honored and proud to accept and recognize the offer to be KNP's presidential standard-bearer)," Poe told reporters.

He did not want to comment on the parallel effort of Sen. Panfilo Lacson to be the united opposition's presidential candidate. He said this was because the Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino, the main opposition party which is splir between him and Lacson, was set to meet the same day.

Poe is backed by the faction of Sen. Edgardo Angara, LDP party chair and president, while Lacson is supported by the faction of the party's secretary general, Makati Rep. Agapito "Butz" Aquino.

But Poe did say he was certain Lacson would run for president.

The actor also said he would announce his choice of running mate, as well as the other candidates of the coalition, next week.

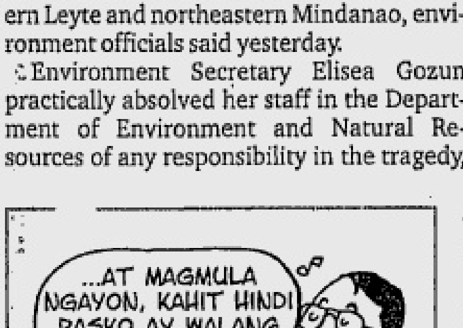
Among the persons recommended to him as possible running mates were Senators Loren Legarda, Aquilino Pimentel Jr. and Gregorio "Gringo" Honasan and former Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago.

Asked what qualities he was looking for in a running mate, Poe said he wanted someone "who could be of great help" to the country. But he said he was still in the process of meeting the prospective candidates.

Poe said he was also fine-tuning his platform of government.

"I'm still consulting with different sectors ... because I want to make sure that this could be im-

FPJ ACCEPTS/ A4



...AT MAGMULA NGAYON, KAHIT HINDI PASKO AY WALANG JUETEEENG!
HER

'Jueteng' ends on Christmas, says PNP chief

By Christian V. Esguerra

WAS HE dreaming or simply joking?

Believe it or not, the entire country will be free of "jueteng" operations by Christmas Day, or even today, according to Philippine National Police chief Director General Hermogenes Ebdane Jr.

So taking Ebdane's word for it, what past administrations had failed to root out in decades, he and the 114,000-strong PNP would have eliminated in exactly one week—well, almost.

After ordering his men to clear their jurisdictions of jueteng in a week from Dec. 15, Ebdane yesterday announced that the illegal numbers game no longer existed in

JUETENG/ A8

FIRST WOMAN DFA CHIEF

GMA picks Ople successor

By Jerome Aning and Juliet L. Javellana

AN "OLD HAND" in the foreign service, a "very senior career diplomat" who served as dean of the diplomatic corps in Australia in 2001, is the new foreign affairs secretary—and the first woman to hold the title.

Delia Albert, 61, undersecretary in charge of international economic relations, was appointed by President Macapagal-Arroyo to the post left vacant by the death last week of Secretary Blas Ople.

"I am humbled by the confidence given to me by the President and by the challenges and tasks that lie before me. But I am fortified by the memories I have of Secretary Ople and I will carry on his work, inspired by his dedication, commitment and wisdom," Albert said in a press statement.

"I hope to provide the Filipino people with the world-class foreign service that they so justly deserve."

Emerging from an awarding ceremony for diplomats and DFA

GMA PICKS/ A8

INCOMING Foreign Secretary Delia Albert.

ERC junks consumers' bid to stop Meralco hike

By Ronnel W. Domingo
Business

NOT SO fast.

The Energy Regulatory Commission yesterday junked the appeal of at least nine consumer and interest groups to immediately revoke its order giving the Manila Electric Co. provisional authority (PA) to raise power rates starting next month.

ERC Chair Manuel Sanchez said at yesterday's public hearing that the regulator had made a judgment call in issuing the PA, the wisdom of which would be determined through further hearings.

"We will start marathon hearings on Meralco's petition on Jan. 5," Sanchez said. "The result of this could be a revocation of the rate hike, an amendment of it or an outright denial of the petition to raise rates."

The official was reacting to the groups' motion to rescind the PA, which allows the country's largest power distributor to raise its rates by an average of 12 centavos per kilowatt-hour, immediately.

Arsenio Tangco, representing the Federations of Philippine Industries and of Philippine Textile Industries, said the provisional rate increase should be suspended as it posed an economic threat to heavy users of electricity.

"We could see some textile companies closing down because of this. About a third of our operating costs accounts for electricity consumption," Tangco said.

Basilia Tupas, a member of the Martsa ng Bayan Laban sa Meralco (People's March Against Meralco), implored the ERC to take back its Nov. 27 order, saying the rate increase was eating up the poor's already limited earnings.

"Please, please, Your Honor, stop increasing our expenses. We are already too afraid even to look at our monthly bills," Tupas said.

Other groups represented included the militant Bagong Alyansang Makabayan and allied organizations, Philippine Consumer Watch led by former Sen.

ERC JUNKS/ A8

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Visayas and Mindanao including Palawan will experience cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers becoming widespread rains over Southern Mindanao. The rest of the country will be partly cloudy to cloudy with isolated rainshowers.

SOURCE: PAGASA

COMPILED BY: RAY LEYESA, PDI RESEARCH/12/23/03

Metro Manila	Partly Cloudy	Iloilo/Bacolod	Cloudy with Rains
Baguio	Partly Cloudy	Roxas	Cloudy with Rains
Tuguegarao	Partly Cloudy	Cebu	Cloudy with Rains
Laoag	Partly Cloudy	Tacloban	Cloudy with Rains
Clark Zone	Partly Cloudy	Gen. Santos	Widespread Rains
Tagaytay	Partly Cloudy	Zamboanga	Cloudy with Rains
Legazpi	Partly Cloudy	Cagayan de Oro	Widespread Rains
Calapan	Cloudy with Rains	Davao	Widespread Rains

GMA wants Naia 3 opened by May

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo remains keen on opening the controversial Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 3 before the May 2004 elections to bolster investor confidence in the country.

Housing Secretary Michael Defensor told the INQUIRER that the President had expressed her desire for Naia Terminal 3 to start operations preferably before the elections in a number of meetings with her Cabinet officials.

Defensor said the President felt the opening of a world-class airport in time for the peak vacation season that could help lift investor confidence in the country.

He said that while the government was still waiting for the Supreme Court to decide on a just compensation for contractors of Naia's Terminal 3, it has not shut its doors to a possible amicable settlement with its builder, the Philippine International Air Terminals Co. Inc.

The high court earlier ruled that the Piatco contract was invalid and would soon decide on how much compensation the Filipino-German consortium would get from the government.

Piatco's designated negotiator, businessman Jose Ch. Alvarez, said it was still possible to open Terminal 3 before the elections and even before the SC hands down its decision on just compensation. "We're willing to support the President in her goal of opening the world-class airport," Alvarez said.

Alvarez said he has received several feelers to reopen the stalled negotiations between the government and Piatco which collapsed when Fraport filed a suit with the World Bank arbitration body to seek just compensation for its investments in Naia Terminal 3.

Alvarez said previous negotiations between him and the three-man Naia-3 committee, composed of former Trade Secretary Manuel A. Roxas II, Tourism Secretary Richard Gordon, and Transportation Secretary Leandro Mendoza, bogged down due to disagreements over the compensation issue.

Piatco is demanding at least $465 million representing actual construction-related costs plus consultants' fees and financing expenses while the government committee has offered no more than $350 million based on the concession agreement that the project should be worth not less than $350 million.

Alvarez said that if negotiations do resume, his group would continue to insist on the same terms and that Fraport would drop its arbitration suit filed against the Philippine government.

Biazon, Chavez, Yasay head Roco's Senate slate

By Dona Z. Pazzibugan

A REELECTIONIST senator, a broadcaster, two lawyers, a renowned athlete and a witness in the Estrada impeachment trial make up the first half of presidential candidate Raul Roco's senatorial slate.

They are: Sen. Rodolfo Biazon, who bolted the opposition Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino (LDP) last month; GMA-7 broadcaster Jay Sonza, former solicitor general Frank Chavez and lawyer Mel "Batas" Mauricio, world bowling champion Bong Coo, and former Securities and Exchange Commission chair Perfecto Yasay Jr.

As former SEC chief, Yasay took the witness stand in the impeachment trial of Estrada. He and Chavez are running for the Senate for the second time, while Sonza, Mauricio and Coo are running for office for the first time.

Except for Yasay, who was out of town, the candidates discussed campaign plans with Roco and his handlers at Aksyon Demokratiko headquarters in Quezon City yesterday.

Roco said they would file their certificates of candidacy on Dec. 30, Rizal Day. Yasay filed his certificate last week.

At the press conference that followed, Roco said he had two more candidates to add to his senatorial list but the two had asked not to be named yet. He said he would reveal the next six Aksyon candidates for senator on Dec. 30.

Tightlipped about VP

"By then, we think the parallel discussion [going on] with the vice president[ial] candidate will have been finished," Roco said.

But he was tightlipped about whom he was eyeing for his running mate.

Asked if he was in talks with Sen. Robert Barbers, who had threatened to bolt the ruling Lakas-CMD party if he were not chosen as President Macapagal-Arroyo's running mate, Roco replied that they were good friends.

"Barbers is a very good candidate. They all are," he said.

Later, Roco said that aside from the eight senatorial candidates already on his slate, he had six more possible bets in mind.

"If talks bear fruit, some of them will come from other political parties," he said, without elaborating.

Same fate as Erap

As for one of his probable rivals for the presidency, Roco said movie actor Fernando Poe Jr. was likely headed for the same fate as his close friend, ousted President Joseph Estrada.

He said the people behind Estrada were the same ones pushing Poe to run.

"Who were the people who ran the government then? Where is President Erap now? Will a Fernando Poe suffer the same fate?" Roco asked.

Confusion in LDP

Biazon said he joined Roco because he did not want to take part in the "confusion" in the LDP, which has been split by the possible presidential candidacies of Poe and Sen. Panfilo Lacson.

Biazon, who took an "indefinite leave" from the LDP, said he and Roco espoused the same priority programs such as agricultural sufficiency, mass housing and military reforms.

Sonza, for his part, said he has been a "silent" Roco supporter since 1998, when the former senator first ran for president. He said his children are active Aksyon Demokratiko volunteers.

Quit television

I'll be one of the best legislators this country will ever know," he said. Sonza added that once elected, he would quit his TV jobs, unlike fellow broadcasters Sen. Noli de Castro and Sen. Loren Legarda.

Chavez, who ran for the Senate in 1992, said he decided to take another stab at it.

He said of Roco: "Among all the candidates, he best provides an alternative."

Coo, a multi-gold medal winner for bowling, said she would champion the causes of women, the youth and athletes.

Mauricio, who said Roco personally asked him to run, vowed to promote free legal aid nationwide if he won.

Other candidates

At Roco's proclamation rally on Nov. 30, others mentioned as possible senatorial candidates were former President Fidel V. Ramos' daughter Cristy Ramos, Misamis Occidental Rep. Oscar Moreno, who bolted the administration Lakas-CMD party; the late Sen. Rene Cayetano's daughter Pia Cayetano, GMA 7 broadcasters Oscar Orbos and Solita Monsod, and retired Gen. Romeo Maganto.

Cristy Ramos pledged her support to Roco, but has so far not said if she would run.

Roco is running under the Alliance of Hope, a coalition of his Aksyon party, former Executive Secretary Rene de Villa's Reporma and former Cebu Gov. Lito Osmeña's Promdi.

STAND BY. Presidential aspirant Raul Roco (center) and his senatorial candidates flash a familiar sign during the announcement of their 2004 slate yesterday. From left: Sen. Rodolfo Biazon, lawyer and broadcast commentator Mel Mauricio, champion bowler Bong Coo, former solicitor general Frank Chavez, and television journalist Jay Sonza. Promdi party president Lito Osmeña (third from right) showed up for moral support. Not in photo is the sixth candidate Perfecto Yasay.

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Please be informed that the LDP Committee created to investigate the complaint against Party Chairman Edgardo J. Angara for acts of disloyalty; acts inimical to the interest of the Party; and culpable violation of the LDP Constitution has placed him under preventive suspension as Party Chairman effective immediately.

He was likewise directed to refrain from exercising official acts in behalf of the party.

Considering his suspension, the party's sole signatory to certificates of nomination and certificates of candidacy of LDP candidates is the Party Secretary-General, Cong. Agapito "Butz" Aquino or his duly authorized representative/s.

For compliance.

Makati City, 20 December 2003.

CONG. AGAPITO "BUTZ" AQUINO
Secretary-General

ALL LDP MEMBERS NATIONWIDE ARE ADVISED TO CONTACT THE OFFICE OF THE LDP SECRETARY-GENERAL AT ABOVE ADDRESS AND TEL.NOS. OR CELL NO. 0917-8330932

Advt.

Malacañang keeps mum on GMA's running mate

By Juliet Labog-Javellana

THE CAMP of President Macapagal-Arroyo remains mum on her reported choice of Sen. Noli de Castro as her running mate, despite disclosures by administration officials that this was a done deal.

"For the President, [picking] the vice presidential candidate is a continuing process. It's still being validated," said Housing Secretary Mike Defensor, spokesperson for the President's election campaign.

Defensor said the President was still studying who among De Castro, Sen. Robert Barbers, Senate President Franklin Drilon, Tourism Secretary Richard Gordon and Metro Manila Development Authority chair Bayani Fernando to pick for her running mate.

Defensor said the President had been talking to Barbers because she considered him a valuable ally in the Senate and in the campaign against illegal drugs.

Barbers had presented himself as a vice presidential candidate, administration officials said, but they admitted the President was likely to choose the more popular De Castro, even though he was not a member of Lakas-CMD, the President's party, and was a political neophyte.

Defensor said the President would file her certificate of candidacy when her entire ticket has been finalized.

"It may be after Christmas," he said.

The President and her family will be spending Christmas and the New Year in Baguio City.

She will reportedly announce her ticket there on Dec. 30, on the first anniversary of her historic announcement that she would not be running for President. She retracted that statement 10 months later.

Ms Macapagal is then expected to lead her ticket to the Commission on Elections after the New Year to file their certificates of candidacy.

"You have to understand that the President can proclaim [her slate] at any time. We're just working through the process. What is important to us is we get a slate that would be able to help the President in her agenda, and in the case of the senatorial candidates, to push her legislative agenda (such as) housing, health care and infrastructure development," Defensor said.

He said the proclamation of the President and the other candidates would be simple.

"The President would like to have a simple proclamation, without much fanfare and without mobilizing thousands of people and having a grand rally as others would."

Defensor said the President will be supported in her election bid by the ruling Lakas-CMD, "stalwarts" of the Nationalist People's Coalition and "individual" members of the Liberal Party.

2 suspected JIs arrested

By Martin P. Marfil

TWO suspected members of the regional terror network Jemaah Islamiyah were arrested by government agents recently, a Bureau of Immigration and Deportation official said yesterday.

The BID identified the two suspected JI members as James Stubbs Jr., who is also known as Jamil Daoud Mujahid, and his brother Michael Ray Stubbs.

Sketchy reports said the two were arrested by a group of immigration and naval intelligence agents in an operation in Tanza, Cavite last Dec. 13.

From Cavite, the two were brought to Bicutan where they are undergoing tactical interrogation.

Lawyer Faisal Hussein, BID intelligence chief, told reporters that the suspects, both Jordanians, denied any link to the JI and claimed they were just businessmen.

The military has launched a manhunt for some 31 JI operatives believed to be still in Mindanao where they are believed to be maintaining facilities to train new recruits in bomb-making and other terrorist tactics.

The JI has been blamed for a string of terrorist strikes in Southeast Asia including the Oct. 12, 2002 bombings in Bali, Indonesia that killed 202 people and the attack on the J.W. Marriott Hotel in Jakarta in August where 12 people died.

The JI, which envisions the establishment of a Pan-Islamic state in Southeast Asia, is believed to have links to the al-Qaida terror group of Osama bin-Laden.

Riyadh hunger strike over; workers coming home soon

FIVE-MONTH-OLD Debrah Lyn Mondragon may finally see her father Danny for the first time after government announced resolution of the hunger strike in Jeddah. Debrah and her mother, Anna Debbie, joined relatives of migrant workers last week to seek help for the immediate repatriation of their kin to Manila. JOAN BONDOC

By Martin P. Marfil

THEY may be home soon, though a bit on the thin side.

The hunger strike by 16 stranded overseas Filipino workers in Saudi Arabia is over and there is a chance some of them would be coming home soon, said a labor official yesterday.

Acting Labor Secretary Manuel Imson said the protest ended at around 1 a.m. (Manila time) yesterday when the workers were peacefully removed by Saudi police and brought to the Semesi Hospital for medical checkups.

"From there, the protesters were taken to the immigration center where their respective cases will be addressed with the help of Saudi authorities and Filipino embassy and labor officials. We are helping in the resolution of their cases and right after that, we'll book them for Manila," Imson said.

At least four of the 16, Imson said, have already settled their claims with their employers and could go home as soon as they receive exit visas.

The 16, alleging maltreatment and non-payment of salaries by their Saudi employers, launched a hunger strike last week in a bid to pressure the Philippine government into repatriating them.

The workers camped out on the Philippine Embassy grounds in Riyadh for several days and refused to budge despite offers of shelter by members of the Filipino community.

The breakthrough came before dawn yesterday.

"Apparently, they realized that the government was working for them. Earlier, we filed a note verbale with the Saudi government (to expedite) the issuance of their exit visas and the Saudi government has expressed its willingness to help resolve the case," Imson said in a phone interview.

Their demand for repatriation was met by a "complication," however, after it was learned that members of the group had pending claims against their employers, which would be adversely affected if they left the country.

At the height of their protest, the workers formed the Kapatiran ng mga Migranteng Stranded sa Riyadh.

In the Philippines, their relatives wrote President Macapagal-Arroyo, seeking her help in their repatriation.

According to data released by a migrant workers' group, Migrante, about 300 overseas Filipino workers—hailed by the government as heroes for bringing in dollars which help to prop up the cash-starved economy—are either stranded or unjustly languishing in jails in Saudi Arabia.

Lanao Sur lawmaker bats for Barbers

By Carlito Pablo

A FORMER Muslim secessionist leader yesterday pushed for Sen. Robert Barbers as the running mate of President Macapagal-Arroyo in next year's elections, saying a vice president from Mindanao is an "advantage in seeking a lasting peace" in the troubled island.

Rep. Benasing Macarambon Jr. (NPC, Lanao del Sur), a former commander of the Moro National Liberation Front, said that a Mindanaoan vice president would help facilitate the peace process between the government and Muslim secessionist groups.

"We have to campaign and support a ticket that is reflective of our legislative and executive agenda for our constituents," he said.

Macarambon said that it is important for him and other Mindanao lawmakers to push for Barbers.

"The rebels will deal with him knowing that both parties have a common denominator and that is their place of birth," he said.

Macarambon noted that among the vice presidential aspirants, only Barbers and Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr. hail from Mindanao.

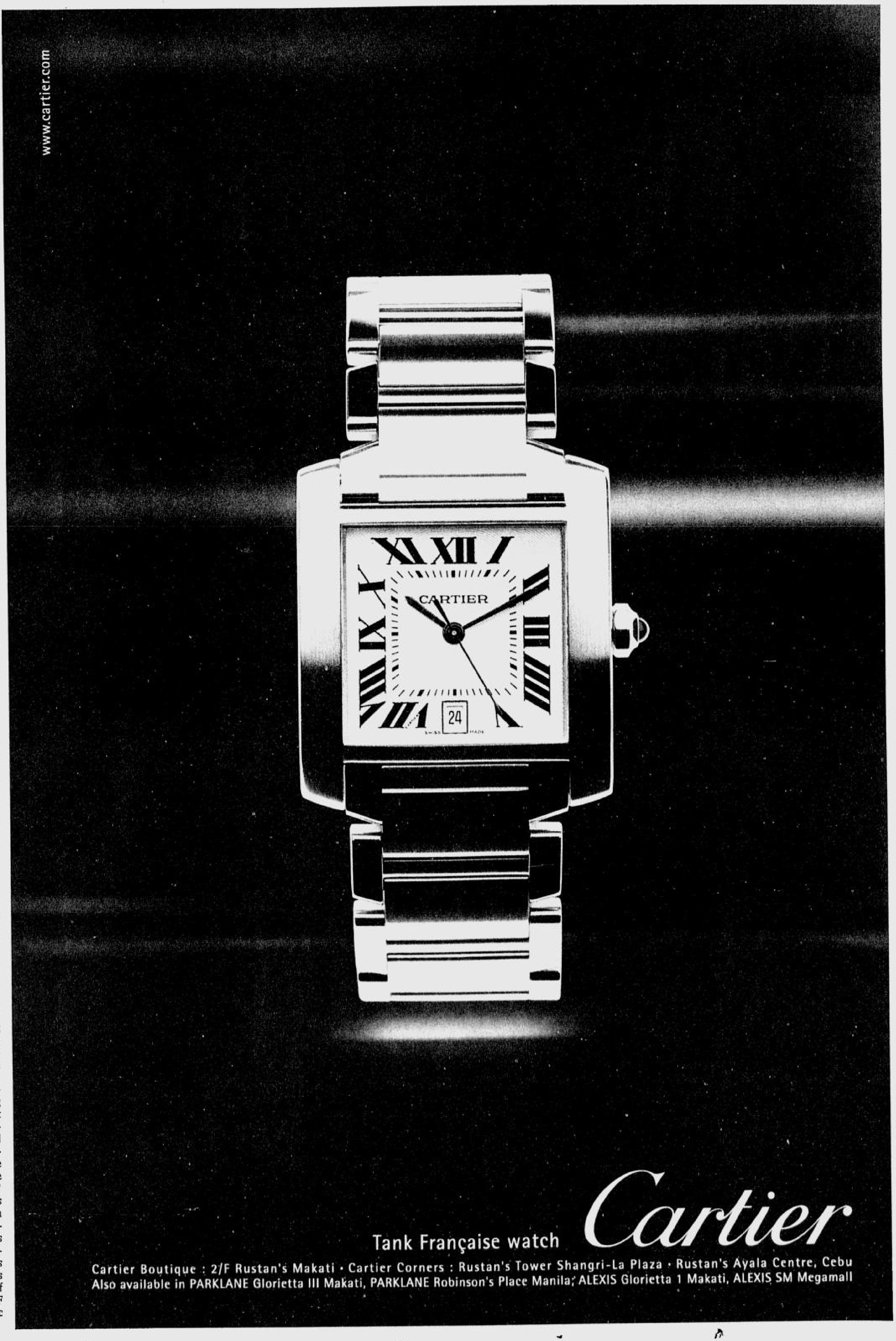
Ms Macapagal has reportedly narrowed down her choice of running mate in next year's elections to between Barbers and broadcaster Sen. Noli de Castro, who has been consistently leading in both presidential and vice presidential poll surveys.

"I believe that whoever wins in the coming elections, the next vice president must play an active role in Mindanao," he said.

Macarambon was one of the 25 leaders of the Nationalist People's Coalition who earlier signed a covenant with the ruling Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats to support the presidential bid of Ms Macapagal.

Macarambon reminded Malacañang that it is an "open secret in many parts of Mindanao that political and rebel leaders can commit solid votes because of their vast influence over their constituents."

To drive home his point, Macarambon said that Barbers, a former police officer, is "well-liked by the majority of political leaders in Mindanao and has earned the respect of members of the MNLF and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front."



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BF: Ping's top choice for running mate?

By Carlito Pablo

LACSON

THIS TICKET may be "right" in more ways than one.

Rep. Gilbert Remulla (LDP, Cavite) yesterday said declared vice presidential aspirant Bayani Fernando, chair of the Metro Manila Development Authority, was the "front runner" among Sen. Panfilo Lacson's choices for a running mate.

Remulla said Lacson and Fernando have had talks about a ticket in 2004, adding that "BF is willing to cast his lot with Ping."

Fernando had previously offered himself to be President Macapagal-Arroyo's running mate, but he appeared to be a far third choice to popular broadcaster Sen. Noli de Castro and Sen. Robert Barbers.

Asked why Fernando was Lacson's top choice, Remulla said: "BF shares the same political will that Lacson shows."

But Fernando had a somewhat different take on the proposed ticket. "I'm greatly honored, but I haven't given it deep thought."

He added: "I'm still confident that my own party Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats will pick me as its official vice presidential candidate."

The MMDA head told the INQUIRER he met with Lacson a month ago, "but the meeting was unofficial."

"We did not discuss anything definite. We met because we are friends in the first place," he said in Filipino.

Still optimistic

Remulla said he and other leaders in the Lacson camp remained optimistic that their candidate and movie actor Fernando Poe Jr. could still settle their differences and put up a united opposition ticket. *(See story on Page A1.)*

"We're still focused on that," Remulla said. "There's no way but to unite."

Remulla said that ousted President Joseph Estrada was brokering a Lacson-Poe meeting before Dec. 25.

"Someone's gotta give way," Remulla said. "The important thing here is to increase the opposition's chances of winning by uniting under one ticket." *With a report from Margaux Ortiz*

FPJ accepts draft of opposition bloc

From page A1

plemented," he said in a mix of Filipino and English. "And not just make promises."

The actor said he was still discussing with his advisers the best time for filing his certificate of candidacy.

Initially, Angara said Poe would file it on Dec. 29.

Politicians' role

Asked what role politicians and political parties would play in his campaign, Poe said that if he succeeds, the role of everyone should be to serve the people and the country.

Pressed whether he would join a political party, Poe was noncommittal: "As of now, I'm still under a coalition."

He told radio reporters after the news conference that he was running for president because he was spurred on by the people and his supporters to do so.

With Poe were his supporters from such groups as the FPJ for President Movement. Just as when he declared he was running for president at the Manila Hotel on Nov. 26, he did not come with any politicians.

But several retired generals identified with the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos attended Poe's news conference and told Reuters that at least 50 former high-level officers were backing the movie star.

"Poe is the catalyst for unifying this country," said Jaime Echevarria, a retired brigadier general.

Acceptable formula

Poe's acceptance of the KNP nomination complicates deposed President Joseph Estrada's self-imposed task: a race against time to forge an acceptable "formula" that will force the opposition to field only one presidential candidate in May.

ACTOR Fernando Poe Jr. announces his acceptance of the nomination of the Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino to be its standard-bearer. JESS YUSON

"I will try my very best to work out a formula that will be acceptable and beneficial to both of them. One of them will have to give in," Estrada said, referring to Poe and Lacson.

Estrada, titular head of the groups opposing the Macapagal administration, admitted that Poe and Lacson would not only split the votes of the opposition, but split the LDP as well.

"There should be a graceful exit to either of them who would withdraw from the race. We are looking for a formula for one of them to slide or withdraw," Estrada said in mixed Filipino and English.

Although detained at Camp Capinpin while facing plunder and graft charges before the Sandiganbayan, Estrada said he was working on a last-ditch effort to get Lacson and Poe to work together.

After meeting with opposition Rep. Ronaldo Zamora, Lacson's campaign manager, Estrada is set to meet with Angara today.

Estrada will also meet with Aquino.

"We are not giving up hope," the former President said.

Although he had earlier said he was supporting Poe, a friend and political supporter of 30 years, Estrada said he was now willing to have a situation where either Poe or Lacson would withdraw, "so long as we have only one (opposition presidential) candidate."

"That is our target—one candidate," he said.

He denied talk that Lacson had asked for his nominees be appointed to key positions in government as a condition for him to withdraw from the presidential race.

"There is no compromise. We don't enter into any compromises. One will withdraw without any consideration or concession," he said, adding that neither of them had asked for any.

Opposition unity?

Angara said that with Poe's nomination, the "opposition is now united behind one single presidential candidate."

"FPJ is now the sole and undisputed standard-bearer of the united opposition in the 2004 elections," the senator said.

A survey conducted by the Social Weather Stations this month showed that Ms Macapagal would likely lose her job if elections were to be held today, with her approval ratings on the wane amid perceptions of corruption.

The poll showed that a majority would vote for either Poe or Sen. Noli de Castro, a broadcaster. De Castro, however, has not declared his intention to run.

Poe, a high school dropout, has never held public office and his candidacy has spooked the financial markets.

The President's political spokesperson, Housing Secretary Michael Defensor, said Ms Macapagal would file her certificate of candidacy shortly after Christmas.

"Definitely, how things are coming out and how the President is continuously being berated and criticized, I think clearly the underdog is turning out to be the President at this point," he said.

"We would like to elevate the plane of debate and discussion to programs, policies and the quality of leadership of those who will lead this country from 2004 to 2010," Defensor said. *With reports from Armand N. Nocum; Reuters, AFP, AP*

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LDP row: 15 leaders air support for Angara

By Christine O. Avendaño

WITH FERNANDO Poe Jr.'s acceptance of the opposition's presidential nomination, Sen. Edgardo Angara yesterday moved to strengthen his hold on the Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino, which has been riven by infighting over its choice of a standard-bearer.

In a press conference at the Senate, 15 of 16 LDP regional chairs came along with 26 other party mates to express their "full and unqualified support" for Angara's leadership, as well as Poe's acceptance of the new Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino's nomination to be its presidential candidate.

The LDP formed the KNP, along with Joseph Estrada's Puwersa ng Masang Pilipino and PDP-Laban.

Poe's acceptance of the nomination has forced Sen. Panfilo Lacson, his erstwhile rival for the opposition's nod, to go ahead with his own presidential bid.

A statement issued by the LDP faction backing Lacson said the senator would go ahead with his presidential bid "since his supporters have been painstakingly organizing in various parts of the country since last year."

Former congressman Mike Romero told reporters the LDP's regional, provincial and city leaders support Angara, including his move to coalesce with other opposition groups and field a unity ticket for the 2004 polls.

"We stand by the actions taken by chairman Angara to preserve and protect the integrity, credibility, unity and solidarity of the LDP," Romero said, reading from a prepared statement. "Together with our chairman, we will not tolerate any action that seeks to divide and sow chaos within our party."

Romero said Rep. Agapito "Butz" Aquino had no authority to suspend Angara since under the constitution and by-laws of the party only Angara and the National Executive Council had the authority to do any suspending.

He said it was Aquino who was placed under indefinite leave since Dec. 6.

When asked if disciplinary action would be taken against the "renegade faction" of the LDP, Romero said: "As far as we're concerned, these are members of the LDP and we have a continuing dialogue with our colleagues, but I'm very positive that at the end of the day we will end up with one candidate for president, FPJ."

Sen. Loren Legarda, meanwhile, welcomed Poe's acceptance of his nomination. Legarda has been touted to be his running mate.

"His candidacy was already declared so it was expected that he would accept (the KNP nomination)," Legarda said. "That's welcome news so that the political landscape would be clarified," she added.

She admitted that she recently met with FPJ but declined to say what they talked about.

Vilma for mayor, not governor

LIPA CITY—Mayor Vilma Santos-Recto filed her certificate of candidacy at the city's Commission on Elections office early yesterday morning.

No, she's not running for governor; she wants a last term as mayor.

"Being governor is one step higher in the political arena, but it's no joke," the actress-turned-politician said. "My first priority is still my family."

Santos admitted that many people urged her to run for the higher office. "I would like to thank (them)," she said, "because that means they really trust me."

She said Sen. Ralph Recto, her husband and political adviser, had repeatedly asked what she really wanted to do. "My decision is to finish my last term," Santos said. "I told (Ralph) I wanted to finish all my projects first."

Her running mate will be Lipa councilor Lidio Lopez, since vice mayor Boy Manguera has declined on account of "family matters." His wife is rumored to have applied for annulment because of his womanizing.

Santos defended the vice mayor: "His reasons are like mine. His first priority is his family."

Also in the mayoralty race are former Lipa mayor Ruben Umali, former army colonel Ricardo Macala, and lawyer Mario Panganiban, who ran in 2001 but lost.

Santos clarified she was still with the Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats. She earlier said she would remain faithful to the party, but not if actor Fernando Poe Jr. joined the presidential race, in which case she would campaign for him.

But she has apparently changed her mind. "I think (Poe) would understand," she said. "*Pero kung kakastiguhin ang integridad nya, ipaglalaban ko siya* (but if they question his integrity, I would fight for him)."

Poe is a good person, Santos insisted. "But when it comes to politics and governance, he will need the best help he can find." *Mei Magsino, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

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RP to share info from Robot with Germans, Finns, French

HE PHILIPPINES is willing to hare any information obtained rom captured Abu Sayyaf leader alib Andang with Germany, rance and Finland that could ead to the dismantling of terror-st cells, the military said yester-ay.

AFP chief of staff Gen. Narciso Abaya assured diplomats from the three countries in a meeting yesterday that Manila will pass on to them any information obtained from Andang, alias Commander Robot, who was captured early this month following an encounter with government troopers.

Military spokesperson Lt. Col. Daniel Lucero said that Abaya promised the diplomats access to any valuable intelligence data Andang might divulge, including the scope of the Muslim group's operations in Mindanao.

"They asked whether the (military) will allow their respective investigators to have access to Robot and the chief of staff gladly told them that the (military) is willing to share with them" any information, he said.

The governments of Germany, France and Finland consider this month's arrest of Andang, "a serious blow to the Abu Sayyaf and more widely to terrorism," Lucero said.

In a meeting with Abaya, French and German officials yesterday proposed to send their own men to interrogate Andang for his role in the abduction of Europeans in April 2000.

The proposal was made by French first counselor Vincent Hommeril and military attaché Capt. Michael Melin and German first secretary Theodore Proffe who made a brief call on Abaya at Camp Aguinaldo.

"They asked whether the AFP will allow their respective investigators to have access to Robot and the chief of staff gladly told them that the AFP is willing to share the results of the tactical interrogation," Lucero told reporters.

Abaya, for his part, requested the foreign diplomats to share any information on the amount of ransom paid by their nationals, if any, to the Abu Sayyaf bandit in exchange for their freedom.

"The chief of staff is serious about knowing the background of this ransom payment and he asked these visitors to provide the AFP, if they have any information about that," Lucero said.

The 36-year-old Andang led a faction of the al-Qaida-linked group that kidnapped 21 Finnish, French, German, Lebanese, South African, Malaysian and Filipino tourists and resort workers from the Sipadan diving spot off Borneo island in April 2000.

All hostages were released in batches after several months, allegedly after payment of ransom reaching up to $25 million and provided by Libya, a former negotiator has claimed.

Troops captured Andang in Indanan, Sulu on Dec. 7, effectively neutralizing Abu Sayyaf which has carried out numerous kidnappings and deadly bombings against Christian and foreign targets in this overwhelmingly Catholic country in the past decade.

The group is also suspected of killing two US hostages and has been labelled "foreign terrorist organization" by Washington.

President Macapagal-Arroyo said last week Manila would allow German prosecutors to interrogate Andang, after a court in Goettingen said it wanted him extradited to face trial there for the abduction of a German family of three who were among the Sipadan hostages.

The military has started conditioning Andang, who is still recuperating from the amputation of wounded left leg at the V. Luna Medical Center in Quezon City, for his full interrogation.

"The AFP is presently conditioning Robot about the future of plans of the AFP ... the gist of the questions that will be raised during his tactical interrogation," Lucero said, noting that so far the bandit leader has only disclosed details of their operations. *AFP with a report from TJ Burgonio*

Negros solon seeks OK of anti-SARS bill

By Cynthia D. Balana

A VISAYAN congressman yesterday pushed for the final approval of the anti-Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) bill in order to protect the country from a resurgence of the killer disease in Asia.

Negros Occidental Rep. Apolinario Lozada, chair of the House committee on foreign relations, expressed alarm over the new SARS case reported recently in neighboring Taiwan. He said SARS could enter the Philippines again if there was no institutionalized system in place to fight the disease.

Reports said a Taiwan military medical researcher who had been studying SARS at the National Defense University in Taipei caught the virus as he tried to disinfect a contaminated trash bag.

"This is a very serious development. We cannot effectively wage a war against the deadly disease unless we have an institutionalized campaign. The SARS bill seeks to do just that," said Lozada, principal author of the measure.

The bill was approved on second reading by the House in August. It seeks to establish a mandatory quarantine program and institutionalize the government's anti-SARS campaign in order to fight the disease as well as other highly contagious illnesses like the Japanese encephalitis virus, malaria and tuberculosis.

The bill would empower the government to take the steps necessary to prevent the spread of the disease, like isolating large areas where suspected carriers may live and enclosed public places like malls which sick people might visit.

The law would also identify the government facilities where those afflicted with a fatal disease could be quarantined for a period of time.

Lozada said the military and police would play a major role in the implementation of the law.

He warned that failure to quickly pass the SARS bill could be very costly.

"We have seen how deadly the disease is. We would not want our people to panic needlessly when we can do something about it," he said.

Lozada noted that the lack of an institutionalized campaign against SARS had made it very hard for the government to quarantine possible SARS carriers last March when the disease broke out in Hong Kong.

The plague killed more than 800 people and infected 8,000 others in at least 30 countries.

"SARS will be in our midst longer than we can ever imagine so our government must be prepared to deal with the lethal disease," he said.

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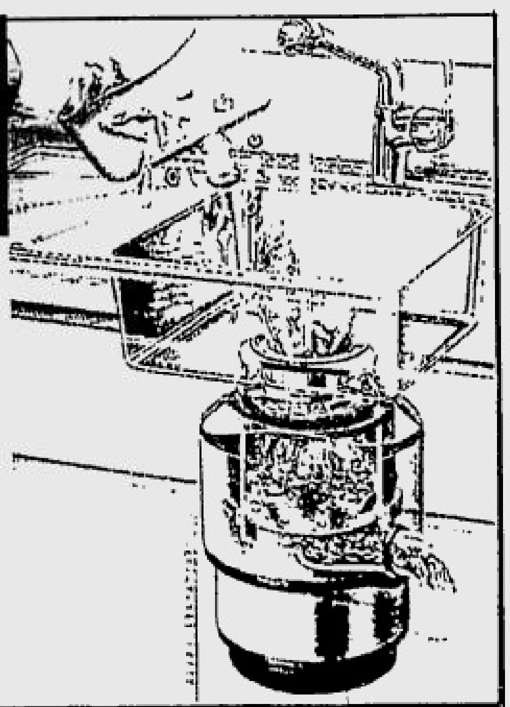

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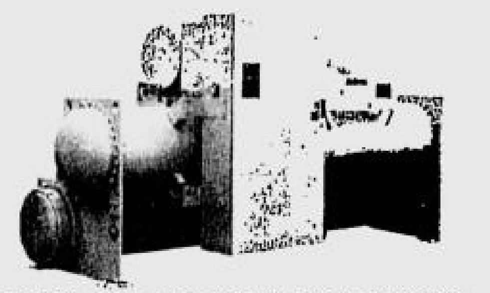

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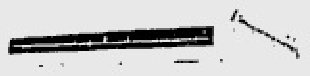

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NBI operatives seized two hundred sixty-three (263) boxes of fake "SANDCUT" and "SANDFLEX" Hacksaw blades from HORIZON ELECTRICAL SUPPLY & GENERAL MERCHANDISE / Paul Desierto Po otherwise known as Pablo P. Desierto. Sandvik AB and Kapman AB are now preparing the necessary criminal and civil complaint-charges against the said establishment and the alleged owner/proprietor, Paul Desierto Po otherwise known as Pablo P. Desierto. If convicted, Paul Desierto Po otherwise known as Pablo P. Desierto may face penalties of imprisonment from two (2) to five (5) years per charge of unfair competition and trademark infringement plus fines of P50,000.00 to P200,000.00 per conviction.

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Datumanong quits DOJ to run for Congress

By Philip C. Tubeza

JUSTICE Secretary Simeon Datumanong yesterday became the second Cabinet member to resign to run for Congress in next year's elections.

Datumanong said he submitted his resignation letter to Malacañang yesterday morning and that it would take effect this afternoon.

He said he would file on Dec. 29 his candidacy for his old seat in the House of Representatives as the congressman of the second district of Maguindanao province.

Trade and Industry Secretary Mar Roxas earlier resigned in preparation for his bid for the Senate.

Despite rumors that he would recommend a successor at the DOJ, Datumanong said he did not recommend anyone to the post he vacated.

"I did not recommend anybody because I'm leaving it to the President to decide who should replace me," Datumanong said.

He said he did not even submit a list of of possible successors to the Palace because "the President knows who (to appoint)."

Datumanong said that he would appoint an officer in charge (OIC) only if Malacañang does not announce the name of the new DOJ secretary by this afternoon.

Several names have been floated as Datumanong's possible successors. These include former Supreme Court Justice Josue Bellosillo and Iloilo Rep. Raul Gonzalez.

Datumanong served three terms as Maguindanao representative from 1992 to 2001 before President Macapagal-Arroyo appointed him secretary of the Department of Public Works and Highways after the Edsa II revolt.

He is the only Muslim member of Ms Macapagal's Cabinet who heads a major department and is also one of the vice presidents of the ruling party Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrat.

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Tuesday, December 23, 2003
4th Week of Advent

1st Reading:	Mal 3:1-4, 23-24
Gospel:	Lk 1:57-66

When the time came for Elizabeth, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the merciful Lord had done a wonderful thing for her and they rejoiced with her.

When on the eighth day they came to attend the circumcision of the child, they wanted to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, "Not so; he shall be called John." They said to her, "No one in your family has that name;" and they asked the father by means of signs for the name he wanted to give. Zechariah asked for a writing tablet and wrote on it, "His name is John," and they were very surprised. Immediately Zechariah could speak again and his first words were in praise of God.

A holy fear came on all in the neighborhood, and throughout the Hills of Judea the people talked about these events. All who heard of it pondered in their minds and wondered, "What will this child be?" For they understood that the hand of the Lord was with him.

Commentary

When John the Baptist is named, his father Zechariah recovers his voice, his ability to speak. Perhaps this is not purely coincidental, for John, whose future is the subject of speculation among his parents' neighbors ("What will this child be?" they ask) will precisely become the "voice crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord." John is the Voice, but as St. Augustine insists, Christ is the Word. We live in an age of strident voices speaking words that kill the spirit, that deceive and destroy. There is a need for people who, like John, will dedicate their voices to speaking the Word of truth and transformation who is Christ.

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SUPREME COURT DOCTRINES

CRIMINAL LAW (MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES)—Self-defense—We stress that when the accused invokes self-defense, the burden of proof is shifted from the prosecution to the defense. Thus, the latter assumes the responsibility of establishing this plea by clear and convincing evidence. Upon its shoulder rests the duty of proving, to the satisfaction of the trial court, the justifying circumstance of self-defense. The accused who avers that the killing arose from an impulse of self-defense has the onus probandi of proving the elements thereof. The essential requisites of self-defense are the following: (1) unlawful aggression on the part of the victim; (2) reasonable necessity of the means employed to prevent or repel such aggression; and (3) lack of sufficient provocation on the part of the person resorting to self-defense. Verily, to invoke self-defense successfully, there must have been an unlawful and unprovoked attack that endangered the life of the accused, who was then forced to inflict severe wounds upon the assailant by employing reasonable means to resist the attack. [Citations omitted.] [En Banc, Justice Panganiban, People vs Escarlos, G. R. No. 148912, September 10, 2003]

By R. B. Vera

Mom opposes pardon for sons' killer

THE MOTHER of the slain Cebedo brothers of Misamis Occidental and Zamboanga del Norte has appealed to President Macapagal-Arroyo to reject the application for presidential pardon of the convicted killer Roy Yap. Mrs. Lucila Capili Cebedo made the appeal in a letter to the President in the wake of reports that Yap, who is serving a life sentence for the murder of one of the Cebedo brothers, had applied for executive pardon.

The municipal council of Rizal, Zamboanga del Norte, has also issued a resolution calling on the President to deny Yap's application.

Yap and his elder brother, former Sapang Dalaga, Misamis Occidental Mayor Rey Yap, were convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment for the killing of Victorio Cebedo on the eve of the 1992 local elections.

Cebedo, a candidate for mayor in Rizal, was assassinated and his political rival, Roy Yap, and his brother, Rey, were tagged as the masterminds by the confessed gunman.

After a lengthy trial that involved a transfer of venue to Manila and nine judges, the two were convicted and slapped a life imprisonment.

Cebedo's brother, Perfecto, took over as mayoralty candidate and won. He served as town mayor for nine years and later became the town's vice mayor. But in November last year, he was gunned down by assassins in Alabang, Muntinlupa.

A third brother, Prudencio, survived an ambush in Manila in 1995.

Although they were convicted only for the killing of Victorio, the Yap brothers were also tagged as the brains behind the two other attacks because the Cebedo brothers had been protecting the witnesses of the first killing. Their mother, Sapang Dalaga Mayor Pacita Yap, is a fugitive. She is also wanted for murder.

The municipal government of Rizal headed by Mayor Gabriel A. Catane and the Sangguniang Bayan, through a unanimous resolution, also expressed strong opposition to Yap's application for presidential pardon.

The resolution said granting Yap presidential pardon was "an affront on the integrity of the State and a grave violation of the sanctity of life."

It said that the people of Rizal are still in shock and grief over the deaths of Victorio and Perfecto Cebedo and a presidential pardon would be adding insult to injury.

The resolution also warned that releasing Yap would be "tantamount to reinvigorating the moribund drug trafficking" in Sapang Dalaga, his hometown, which had been tagged as the "hub of drug activities and other illegal activities."

Apart from murder and drug trafficking, the Yap brothers have also been linked to gun-running, robbery and counterfeiting activities, even from behind bars at the New Bilibid Prisons.

Deputy Director General Reynaldo Velasco, former director of the National Capital Region Police Office, said that from behind bars, the Yaps have managed to direct the operations of a counterfeiting syndicate behind the printing of fake P500 bills in Metro Manila.

Velasco made the allegation only last April after policemen raided the Yap's family compound in Sapang Dalaga and found counterfeiting machines and high-powered firearms and ammunition. The policemen were in pursuit of a Yap henchman wanted for the murder of a judge.

Earlier, a woman was caught trying to smuggle a cellular phone to Rey Yap. A stack of fake peso bills worth P350,000 was also found in his cell, leading authorities to suspect Yap's involvement in counterfeiting.

The Yaps claimed that the fake bills found in the cell and the counterfeiting machine, firearms and ammunition found in the Yap compound in Sapang Dalaga were planted.

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Pope: Let's pray for Leyte victims

From page A1

of landslides and drowning from Surigao and Compostela Valley in Mindanao and from Maasin City in Leyte.

Civil defense chief Melchor Rosales gave an updated toll of 214 dead or missing, including four people swept away by floods in Bohol.

The government said more than 97,000 other people were displaced in 30 towns and cities, and nearly 8,000 were depending on government rations while camped out in government schools and municipal buildings. A total of 366 houses were damaged or destroyed, while infrastructure and crops worth more than P147 million were lost.

Of the 170 fatalities in Panaon, 77 were recovered in the village of Pinut-an in San Ricardo, 71 in San Francisco, and 22 in Liloan, according to reports reaching the operations center at the provincial capitol in Maasin City.

Television footage showed bodies of a family of five—mother, father and their children aged 5, 12 and 14—lying in the mud and rain of their collapsed house in Liloan.

Rescuers used ropes to pull out the bodies, which were later washed, wrapped in plastic sheets and placed in wooden coffins.

"We found families huddled together, other families were scattered," a rescuer told a TV reporter.

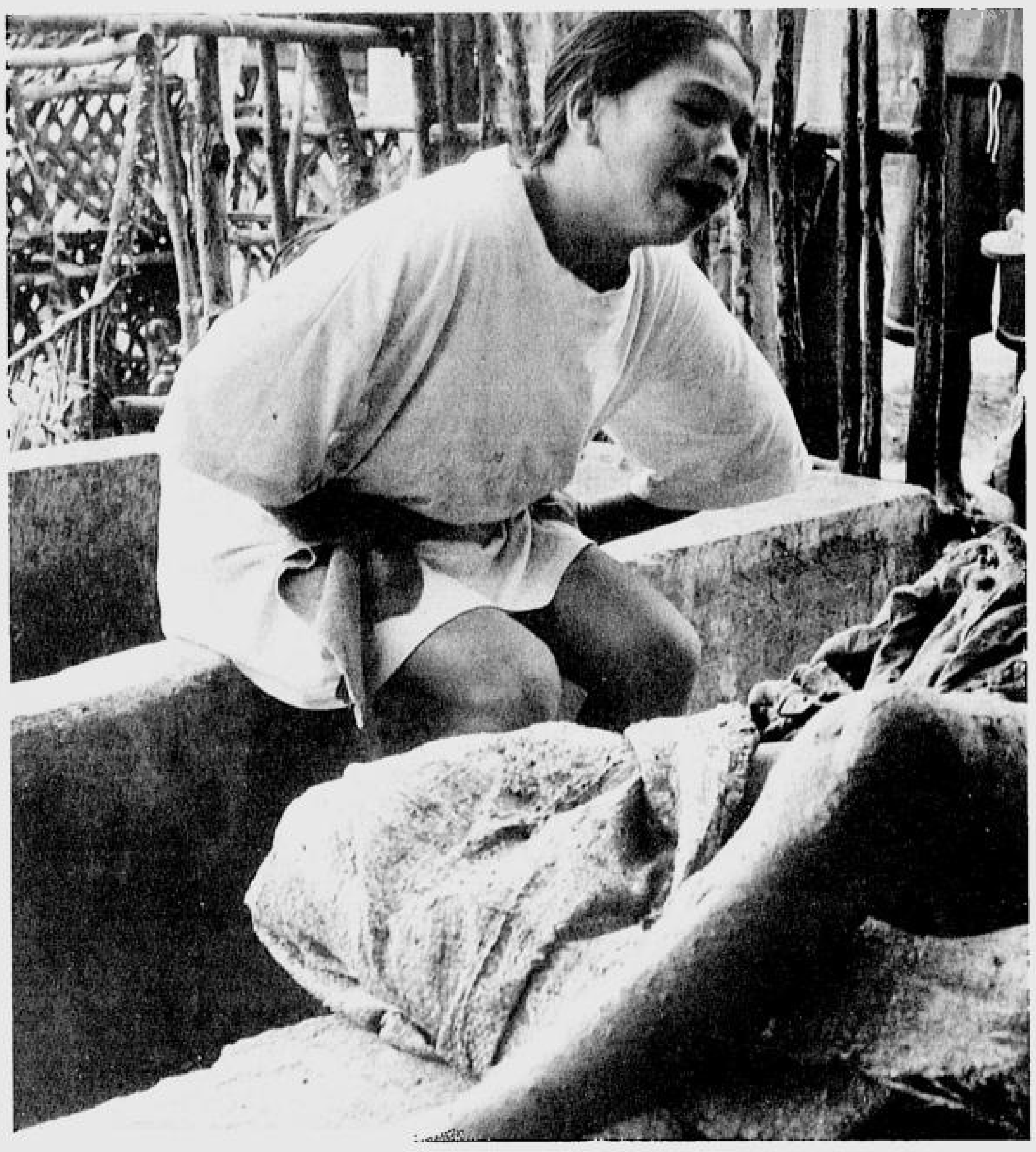
One survivor, a woman identified as Teresita, said she was buried briefly in her home, where rescuers retrieved the body of her 15-year-old daughter Irene late Sunday. "If my daughter is dead, then I want to die too," the woman said, weeping.

Dried-up river

Fr. Manuel Lagumbay, parish priest of San Ricardo, said the more than 200 houses swept away by the flash flood in Pinut-an were sitting on a dried-up river.

"The center of the barangay where the chapel and the houses were built used to be a river," he said on radio station dyLA in Cebu City.

He said that after the non-stop rains for six days, the water merely followed its natural waterway several years ago.



A WOMAN mourns the death of a relative whose body was among those retrieved by rescuers in a landslide-hit village in Liloan, Southern Leyte.

EDWIN BACASMAS

When the water started to trickle down the mountains on Saturday morning, the residents built little canals to guide the flow of the water.

Dondon Lanugon, a resident of Pinut-an, told Lagumbay that he heard a loud sound between 5 and 5:30 p.m. followed by showers of water from the mountains. Suddenly, floodwaters carrying mud rushed down the mountains, sweeping away the homes and the chapel.

The flash flood destroyed 120 houses and damaged 174 others.

About 120 people have been evacuated to the Pinut-an Elementary School, while 20 others were transferred to the nearby Barangay Esperanza.

The Provincial Disaster Coordinating Council said the affected families would be transferred to the gymnasium in the town proper, about a kilometer away, while clearing operations were being conducted.

It said it would also open the roads leading to Pinut-an, which had been cut off due to the landslides.

Lagumbay said Pinut-an had remained impassable. "Can you imagine there were about 20 landslides from Esperanza to Pinut-an," the priest said. Pinut-an is just 2 km from Esperanza.

In Punta, San Francisco, 20 more bodies were recovered yesterday.

Ghost town

San Francisco Vice Mayor Bonifacio Amarga said rescuers had to use masks because of the foul odor.

He said he feared that Punta would become a "ghost town" because the survivors did not wish to return to their village, as they did not want to remember their horrible experience.

Among them, he said, was Punta barangay chair Ricky Subang, who told him that he and the others decided to leave the place following the tragedy.

In Liloan, village officials and the Army's 43rd Infantry Battalion abandoned the retrieval of six bodies buried in the mudslide in Barangay Poblacion.

Mayor Zenaida Maamo said rescuers decided to cover the site with soil because they found it futile to retrieve the remaining bodies.

Thirteen bodies had been recovered in Poblacion and were buried immediately at the Liloan public cemetery.

Stop logging, mining

Manila Archbishop Gaudencio Rosales asked the government to stop logging and mining activities in Leyte, where some 6,000 people lost their lives more than a decade ago in a flash flood in Ormoc, another city in the province.

"There are already signs that things like this happen every 10 years ... May we ask those who are with authority in government to please do something to stop rampant logging and to watch mine sites ... They remain great threats to our people," Rosales said at a press conference yesterday.

An indignant Rosales, a known environmentalist, said that people who have the capacity to stop logging in the province should act now.

"This should not be repeated ... The restoration of those destroyed forests and mine sites must be done as immediately as possible," the archbishop stressed.

He said it was "very alarming" to find another tragedy hit Leyte, adding that the archdiocese of Manila was "very sorry" for what happened to the victims.

He appealed for compassion from the public so that the victims could be helped to rebuild their lives. *With reports from Volt Contreras, PDI Visayas Bureau and AFP*

Even dogs join search for victims

DOGS are helping search and retrieval teams locate the remains of those buried in the mudslide in Surigao City.

Mayor Alfonso Cassura said the death toll in last Friday's landslide reached 15 following the recovery of another body.

Two persons have remained unaccounted for in Sitio Kinabutan, Barangay Rizal.

In Esperanza, Agusan del Sur, a man was killed when he was washed away by the swollen Agusan River on Friday. Feliciano Mango's body was fished from Butuan Bay the day after.

Natz Gastaldo, chief operations officer of the Office of Civil Defense in the Caraga region, said the landslide and floods that struck the region killed 20 persons and injured seven.

More than 24,000 families or some 101,000 individuals have been displaced.

In Southern Mindanao, thousands of people were also forced to evacuate to higher ground due to flash floods and landslides.

The OCD in Southern Mindanao reported that rescue workers were still looking for Archie Alcario, a 7-year-old boy who was swept away by a swollen river in Diwalwal, Monkayo, Compostela Valley on Sunday.

On Friday noon, 5-year-old Gracelyn Bustamante died in a mudslide in Monkayo. Her parents and grandmother suffered minor injuries.

The OCD said some 2,400 families in 19 barangays in Davao del Norte had been affected by the floods.

A landslide also hit a highway connecting Mati town in Davao Oriental and Compostela Valley yesterday.

The road linking Mati and Taragona towns was also closed to traffic due to a landslide. *Reports from Franklin L. Caliguid, Dennis Jay C. Santos, Ferdinand O. Zuasola and Joselle d.R. Badilla, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

GMA picks Ople successor

From page A1

employees yesterday afternoon, Albert, a slight but sprightly woman, told reporters, "It's a daunting task."

She vowed to continue Ople's practice of keeping the public informed of the department's work and policies.

Her first planned activity is a management meeting with department officials. She also said she would address the DFA employees in an assembly shortly.

The President's spokesperson, Ignacio Bunye, said Executive Secretary Alberto Romulo announced the appointment earlier in the day, during the last Cabinet meeting for the year. Albert was present at the meeting.

"Secretary Albert is a very senior career diplomat," Bunye noted. "She has been engaged in the formulation of foreign policies, and is respected not only here but [also] by the international community."

The third DFA chief under Ms Macapagal, she will serve out the remaining six months of the present administration.

Albert has represented the country in various capacities in Switzerland, Romania, Hungary, the former German Democratic Republic, the Federal Republic of Germany and in the Commonwealth of Australia, during which stint she had concurrent accreditation to Nauru, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

While serving as dean of the diplomatic corps in Canberra, she spearheaded a year-long promotion of Philippine arts, culture, and fashion, personally organizing enthusiastically received shows and exhibitions in the Australian capital and nearby Sydney.

She was also a tireless advocate of the welfare of Asian women in the commonwealth, crowning her efforts with a lecture in the prestigious Baker & Mackenzie Australia in Asia Series 2000 on the subject, "What if Women Ruled Asia?"

Fellow career officers welcomed Albert's appointment. Undersecretary for administration Franklin Ebdalin described her as "capable."

A polygot

A graduate of the University of the Philippines, Albert also studied at the Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Switzerland; the Diplomatic Institute in Salzburg, Austria; Boston University Overseas in Bonn, Germany; the Institute of Political Science and Strategic Studies in Kiel, Germany; and the J.F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

She speaks six languages aside from her native Pilipino—English, German, French, Romanian, Spanish and Japanese.

Albert began her career in the DFA as an assistant in the office of Secretary Narciso Ramos in 1967. She passed the Foreign Service Officer's Examination in 1973.

As head of the Philippine mission to the United Nations in Switzerland, she attended conferences of the various UN specialized agencies in Geneva, Vienna, and New York.

In 1992, the Federal Republic of Germany awarded Albert the Knights Commanders Cross of the Order of Merit with Star for her efforts at promoting better relations between Germany and the Philippines, as well as between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the European Union.

She once served as director-general of the Asean National Secretariat of the Philippines. In this capacity, she represented the country in various Asean meetings and summits of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.

The Senate commended her for her role as secretary-general of the conference secretariat during the 4th Apec Economic Leaders' Meeting in Manila in 1996.

After her stint in Australia, she came back to work as assistant secretary of the department's Office of Policy Planning and Coordination. On July 17, 2002, she was appointed undersecretary by Ms Macapagal, who had assumed the top DFA post in a concurrent capacity after the resignation of Vice President Teofisto Guingona Jr.

As undersecretary, Albert represented the country in numerous conferences, among them the Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development Initiative in Rome, sponsored by the Food and Agriculture Organization, in September 2002.

In July, she participated in the International Ministerial Conference on the Dialogue among Civilizations in New Delhi.

In recognition of her status as a woman leader, Albert has been named permanent alternative representative to the National Commission for the Role of Filipino Women.

Albert comes from Baguio City. She is married to a former journalist, Hans Albert, by whom she has a daughter, Joy Angelika. *With reports from AP and Agence France Presse*

'Jueteng' ends ...

From page A1

88 percent of all provinces and cities.

"What was deemed impossible we made possible," he said in a media briefing at PNP headquarters in Camp Crame, Quezon City. "We have cleared only 88 percent [of the provinces] but perhaps, by tomorrow, we shall have completely stopped the operations."

Ebdane appeared irritated when asked if the PNP was indeed close to eliminating jueteng. Many officials had conceded that this was impossible because it was deeply rooted in Philippine culture.

"We're doing it, so what's the question now?" he snapped. "What we are presenting to you are the data. Perhaps the best thing for you to do is to countercheck them with the local level, maybe in the provinces."

Except for 11 provinces and cities, the rest of the country has been cleared of jueteng operations by the police directors, upon consultation with local religious leaders, the PNP chief claimed.

Even Metro

The PNP included Metro Manila in its "cleaned-up" list despite reports of ongoing jueteng operations in several cities and municipalities, such as Pasay.

In the Ilocos region, Ebdane said Pangasinan could not yet be declared "jueteng-free" because of continued operations in Sto. Tomas and San Fabian towns and in the eastern part of the province.

The same was true with Pampanga, where jueteng operations remained in the cities of Angeles and San Fernando, and in Bulacan, whose northern areas were still plagued by illegal gambling, he said.

Jueteng operations were still thriving in parts of Rizal, Cavite, Batangas, Camarines Sur, Zamboanga del Sur, Sulu and Maguindanao, but Ebdane said he was expecting to eliminate them on or before Thursday.

Ebdane claimed that the policy governing the declaration of "jueteng-free" areas was so stringent that no province or town was declared cleared of the illegal numbers game if even "guerrilla-type" operations existed. This type of jueteng has no fixed venue because collectors and middle-level operators move from one area to another to elude arrest.

Campaign

During the week-long campaign, Ebdane said the PNP arrested 1,105 persons, 165 of whom have been charged in court. A total of P384,757 in cash bets was seized.

Besides the one-week deadline, the new "one-strike-you're-out policy" for field commanders helped in the "successful" anti-jueteng operations, the top police official said.

Ebdane had warned local police officials that they would be relieved if they failed to act on illegal gambling to the point that he had to send a Crame-based team to operate in their areas.

Eliminating jueteng "can be done," he insisted. "It's just a matter of having one mind."

The PNP had earlier admitted that the intensified campaign against illegal gambling was meant to prevent some unscrupulous politicians from using jueteng collections as campaign funds in next year's elections.

Despite the "success" of the renewed drive, police authorities have yet to name even a barangay chair involved in illegal gambling.

"We're [still] building up evidence against personalities," Ebdane said. "[But] so far, we have not experienced local officials interfering with our operations."

In Camp Vicente Lim in Laguna, the newly installed chief of the Calabarzon police said last week that he would be using the "one-strike" policy to discipline erring police officers.

Chief Supt. Reynaldo Varilla he would sit with police officers in the region and tell them: "For those who cannot toe the line, I'm sorry."

"They will be uncomfortable," Varilla said at a press conference where police lined up arrested suspects involved in jueteng.

He refused, however, to give the police chiefs a deadline, saying he did not want to pressure them in their operations. *With a report from Marlon Ramos, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

ERC junks consumers' bid to stop Meralco hike

From page A1

Juan Ponce Enrile, Consumers Union of the Philippines, National Association of Electricity Consumers for Reforms, Freedom from Debt Coalition and the Napocor Industrial Customers Association.

Unusual attendance

The hearing, the first on Meralco's latest petition for a rate increase, drew the unusual attendance of members of Meralco's board of directors—former Commission on Elections chief Christian Monsod and Spanish firm Soluziona representative Emilio Vincens.

Monsod said he was there simply to listen, while Vicens declined to give any comment.

Meantime, Meralco vice president Ivanna de la Peña issued a call for sobriety: "We appeal to the public to study and scrutinize the facts first before making a judgment on the issue."

De la Peña said Meralco had been allowed to adjust its rates by only 10.4 centavos in the past nine and a half years—or less than 1.2 centavos every year.

She said that in the same period, the utility giant invested almost P60 billion in its electric distribution system.

Dela Peña said that since 1994, the increase in the prices of such goods and services as liquefied petroleum gas, bus fares or newspapers have been much higher compared to the portion of the monthly electric bill that goes to Meralco.

In an order dated Nov. 27, the ERC said: "Meralco's claim that its present financial condition has resulted in the deferral of major capital projects [such as distribution lines and substations] ... is well taken."

"The inability of Meralco to construct much needed capital projects to meet its customers' growing demand and, at the same time, ensure reliability and efficiency of its existing system would ultimately be to the prejudice of the consumers," the ERC said.

In a briefing earlier this month, Meralco officials said all the revenues from the rate increase would go to the maintenance and expansion of the utility's power distribution system.

"We want a capital expenditures (fund) of P6.5 billion for 2004, but this rate increase would only raise for us about P164 million a month or P1.9 billion in a year," Meralco president Jesus Francisco said.

The company had originally asked the ERC for an increase of 13.58 centavos per kWh.

In its Nov. 27 order, the ERC said: "The [provisional] rate adjustment shall be subjected to refund in the event that this commission, after completion of the hearings on this case, that the same is unjust and unreasonable."

No trace of boat . . .

From page A1

ter and sinking off Palawan.

It was the second major disaster to hit the country in days following the devastating landslides in Eastern Visayas and Mindanao on Friday and Saturday.

Capt. Godofredo Mancal, the Coast Guard district commander, said the 63-ton ML Pia-ry left Mapun in Cagayan de Tawi-Tawi, a cluster of islets in the Sulu Sea, about 5:30 p.m. on Saturday and headed for Brookes Point in Palawan. The trip usually takes a day.

Mancal said the Coast Guard station at Brookes Point said the ferry radioed a distress call about 8:30 a.m. Sunday and placed its location at 60 km off Bugsuk Island and 25 km off Brookes Point. The crew said the Pia-ry was being battered by strong waves due to the strong monsoon wind.

The wooden-hulled vessel was carrying 69 passengers, including seven children aged one to 10, and six crew members.

At about 8:45 a.m., the Coast Guard station sent a ship to the area but stormy weather prompted the vessel to turn back.

At 12:30 p.m., the station at Brookes Point received another distress call saying that the Pia-ry had taken in so much water and would sink in 30 minutes. According to the call, all the passengers and crew members had worn life jackets and transferred to life boats.

Mandal said the Western Command immediately dispatched an OB 10 reconnaissance aircraft but found nothing in the area where the Pia-ry had reportedly sunk. The Western Command also sent the PS 70 fast craft of the Navy but also found no trace of the Pia-ry, the life raft, its passengers or crew members.

Cmdr. Geronimo Malabanan, Navy spokesperson, said an Islander plane scoured the Palawan waters on Monday morning but spotted no survivor. A Chinook helicopter flew over the area in the afternoon but again found nothing.

"So far, there's no sighting of any survivor," Malabanan told the INQUIRER over the telephone.

The Navy has alerted the BRP Quezon and BRP Dagupan City, which are stationed at Tidepole Pier, Puerto Princesa City, as well as members of the Philippine Navy Active Auxiliary Units for search and rescue operations.

"Once our aircraft crew finds any survivor, they would signal the two ships to conduct search and rescue operations," Malabanan said.

Mandal said there was a big probability that the Pia-ry's passengers and crew had taken refuge in some nearby island or islet.

The Coast Guard said the sea in the area was "shark-infested" and "very rough" at this time of the year.

Mandal said the Pia-ry, which was built in 1993 to carry up to 83 passengers and crew members, had passed the annual seaworthiness test.

The Coast Guard station in Brooke's Point has been swamped with queries from relatives of the crew members and passengers, mostly of whom were from the towns of Brooke's Point, Sofronio Espanola and Bataraza.

The owner of the motor launch was identified as Muhammad Hussein.

Rear Admiral Arthur Gosingan, the Coast Guard chief, said he had ordered the suspension of trips of small interisland vessels until the weather improves.

While the search for the Pia-ry was continuing, the Philippine Air Force said that two vessels, which were earlier reported to have run aground in the waters between Palawan and Mindoro, were spotted at around noon yesterday.

"They have been sighted. The MV Explorer is now in Sablayan, Mindoro, while the MV Oceanic is on its way to Batangas," Maj. Restituto Padilla, Air Force spokesperson, said in a phone interview. *With reports from TJ Burgonio and Leila B. Salaverria in Manila*

DENR says roots of disaster beyond anyone's control

From page A1

In one of the stricken villages, Liloan in Southern Leyte, for example, Gozun said forest areas were "reclassified" as agricultural land and their private owners granted titles as early as 1928.

The country's Forestry Code, which prohibits the conversion of forested areas with an 18-percent slope and above, was passed almost 50 years later, in 1975, she added.

"People didn't know any better then," she said.

Geology

Aside from land conversion, Gozun said, one of the "two aggravating circumstances" was the "basic geology" of the affected areas.

Leyte's Panaon Island is streaked lengthwise with fault lines, she said, pointing to a map. The faults leave the soil "fractured" and allow rainwater to seep in easily and "lubricate" underlying rocks.

The second major factor, she said, was the excessive rainfall in the area from Dec. 18 to 21.

While the average rainfall in December in the Leyte area "for the last 30 years" has been 178 mm, up to "699 mm or four times the normal amount" were recorded during those three days alone.

"This is the reality of climate change because of the release of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and with fewer and fewer trees to absorb those gases," she explained.

Dr. Prisco Nilo, chief of Pagasa's weather branch, said the 566-mm rainfall on Dec. 18 in Surigao del Norte could be the highest in almost three decades.

"The rainfall was really abnormal last week," Nilo said in a telephone interview. He said the culprit for the abnormally large amount of rainfall was the low pressure area spotted east of Mindanao on Dec. 18.

"[The low-pressure area] should not have been there unlike the inter-tropical convergence zone and the cold front which we expect to be in the area around this time," Nilo said.

He said the low-pressure area was further enhanced by the cold front affecting Southern Luzon, bringing more rainshowers to the Visayas and Mindanao.

"A low pressure area at this time of the year is a rarity. With the cold front and the ITCZ, the amount of rainfall was enhanced, thus the heavy rains experienced in Leyte and Surigao," he said.

Rarity

Nilo said the weather bureau's statistics showed that the three-day daily average rainfall from Dec. 17 to Dec. 19 in Leyte was 699.1 mm, or more than three times the monthly average for December in Maasin City (the Pagasa weather station in Leyte) for the past 25 years.

Statistics also showed that the four-day daily average from Dec. 16 to 19 in Surigao was 1,177.2 mm or more than twice the monthly average rainfall for December in Surigao also for the past 25 years.

Lourdes Tibig of the climatology section of Pagasa said records showed that the last previous 24-hour high in Leyte was 222.6 mm recorded on Nov. 12, 1990. The last 24-hour rainfall high recorded in Surigao, on the other hand, was 564.7 mm on Nov. 18, 1968.

The highest 24-hour rainfall high recorded in the country at any time in the past 10 years was 1,058.8 on July 4, 2001 in Baguio City when tropical cyclone Feria hit the country.

Shallow roots

The fact that much of the converted lands were planted to coconut trees did not help either, Gozun said, because the coconut has a "shallow root system" and cannot hold earth as well as other forest trees can.

The DENR chief also clarified that no logging concessions were approved on all of Panaon Island, which still has 56-percent forest cover.

"I cannot categorically say that there are no illegal logging operations [on the island] but if there were, these were not massive enough to be blamed [for the disaster]," she said.

Gozún said the disaster should serve as a wake up call for local governments nationwide to plant "deep-rooted trees in sloped areas," devise early warning systems for residents of landslide-prone areas, and have relocation sites ready for such emergencies.

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US raises terror alert for Yuletide

WASHINGTON—The US government raised its terror alert to the second highest level on Sunday and warned Americans there was a high risk militants might launch attacks around the holidays in the United States that could be bigger than those of Sept. 11, 2001.

Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge said threat indicators are "perhaps greater now than at any point" since the 2001 attacks and promised that all federal departments and agencies would increase their defenses against what he called "al-Qaida's continued desire to carry out attacks against our homeland."

The warning came despite White House assurances that many of al-Qaida's operations had been disrupted and that the occupation of Iraq was making the world safer.

Ridge said al-Qaida might try to use aircraft in new attacks—as Osama bin Laden's global network of militants did to strike the World Trade Center and the Pentagon more than two years ago, killing nearly 3,000 people.

US officials attributed the warning to "credible sources," and ordered the color-coded alert system raised to orange—denoting "a high risk" of terrorist attacks—from yellow, which the Department of Homeland Security defines as "a significant" or "elevated" risk of terrorist attacks.

It is the fifth time the orange alert has been activated since the system was instituted in March last year.

"The information we have indicates that extremists abroad are anticipating near-term attacks that they believe will either rival or exceed the attacks that occurred in New York and the Pentagon and the fields of Pennsylvania," said Ridge, who met early on Sunday with President George W. Bush's homeland security advisers.

They recommended the change to Bush, who immediately "concurred with the decision," a White House official said.

At a hastily arranged news conference, Ridge said security would be beefed up at the nation's airports and more agents would be deployed along its borders. Coast Guard air and sea patrols will also increase to protect the nation's critical ports and shipping lanes.

"We will not broadcast our plans to the terrorists. But extensive and considerable protections have been or soon will be in place all across the country," Ridge said.

US officials singled out New York and Washington as possibly the highest-profile targets.

The new warning comes one week after the capture of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, which gave Bush a pre-election year boost in the polls. Bush has portrayed the occupation of Iraq as a front in the war on terrorism. *Reuters*

CHILDREN SHOULD COME FIRST

A child eats toasted corn in the town of Guaribas, northern Brazil, in this March 11, 2003 file photo. President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva launched his "Zero Hunger" campaign in January, promising to expand the effort to 1,000 places like Guaribas and 1.5 million people by the end of 2003. The drive already faces criticism for poor management. AP

Iraq oil pipes attacked; US arrests hundreds

BAGHDAD—An oil pumping station and pipelines were attacked in Iraq as the US top military commander revealed that information gleaned with the capture of ex-president Saddam Hussein resulted in hundreds of arrests.

Gen. Richard Myers, chair of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Sunday several hundred people had been detained in Iraq in a sweep against insurgents using intelligence gained in the wake of Saddam's capture.

Myers said in media interviews the US military believed some of the detainees were leaders of the insurgency against US-led forces in Iraq arrested in a series of raids.

The general told CNN television that some of the information used to identify them had come from a briefcase seized when US forces found Saddam hiding in a hole under a farmhouse near his hometown of Tikrit.

"With the capture of Saddam Hussein, we learned a little bit more about how they're organized and some of the individuals involved," said the general, who has just returned from a visit to Iraq.

"And what you see now is forces taking advantage of that intelligence and going out and rounding up people. We've got over 200 detainees so far."

In Iraq, unidentified attackers fired mortar shells at a pumping station 25 km west of Kirkuk that feeds the internal and export pipeline network to Turkey and Syria, a security official said.

Iraqi police also said they arrested four Iraqis who planned to launch a rocket attack against US forces based at Kirkuk airport and to blow up a giant fuel reservoir near Iraq's largest refinery at Baiji, 180 km north of Baghdad.

Earlier, the US military denied reports of an attack on a pipeline between Baiji and Tikrit, hometown of captured ex-leader Saddam Hussein, and said the fires raging there were the result of burning "residual fuel."

Three anti-tank rockets hit a pipeline south of Baghdad on Friday night causing a "significant" leakage, according to Assem Jihad, spokesperson for Iraq's interim oil minister Ibrahim Bahr al-Ulum.

Jihad also said that an explosive device hit a pipeline in the Mashahda region, 50 km north of the capital. *AFP*

Libya to allow snap UN nuclear arms inspections

VIENNA—Libya has agreed to allow snap UN nuclear arms inspections, just a day after declaring it was giving up plans to build an atomic bomb, a Western diplomat said on Sunday.

Libya, widely praised for announcing on Friday that it was ditching efforts to build the bomb and other banned weapons, told the head of the UN nuclear watchdog on Saturday it was ready to sign up to inspections, the diplomat said.

The surprise moves, which could lead to the end of US sanctions and the return of US oil companies, mark an about-face for Muammar Gaddafi, Libyan leader for 34 years.

"We are turning our swords into plowshares and this step should be appreciated and followed by all other countries," Libyan Prime Minister Shokri Ghanem said of Friday's statement, adding that economic progress was more important than arms.

But Britain, which played a key role in talks that persuaded Tripoli to abandon its arms ambitions, said the fate that befell Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, who was ousted in April by US-led forces, may have prompted the move.

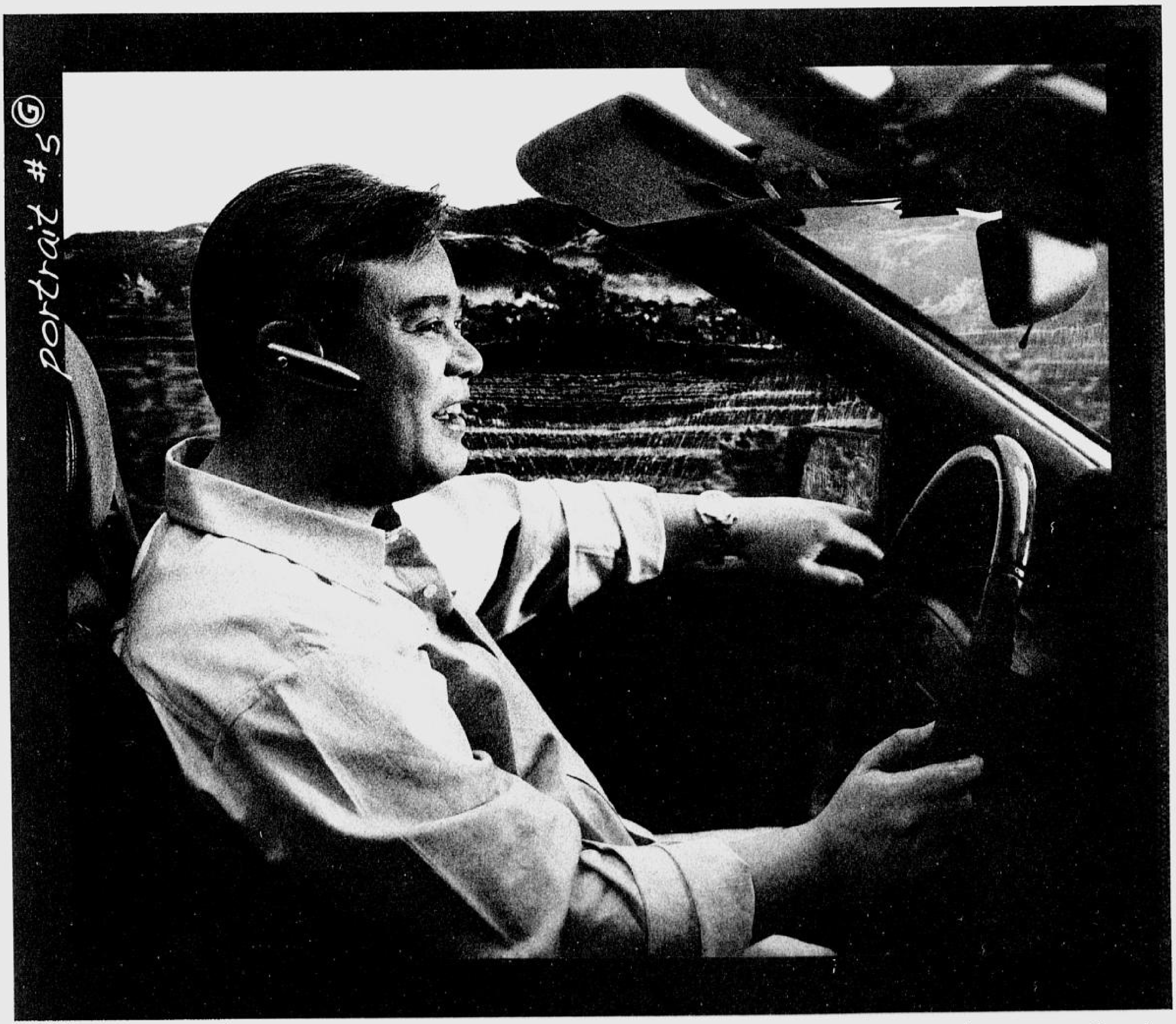
"We showed after Saddam Hussein failed to cooperate with the United Nations that we meant business and Libya, and I hope other countries, will draw that lesson," Defense Secretary Geoff Hoon told Sky television.

In Tripoli, the official Jana news agency said British Prime Minister Tony Blair had "expressed his hope and desire" to meet Gaddafi "and discuss international affairs with him."

The agency said Blair made the offer in a telephone conversation with the Libyan leader. It did not say when this took place and gave no further details.

Earlier in London, Blair's office said there were no plans for the prime minister to meet Gaddafi, as British Sunday newspapers also reported.

An official said Blair spoke to Gaddafi through a translator on Thursday. In a half-hour conversation, they agreed the final wording of Libya's statement on its weapons. *Reuters*



Diana was pregnant at death, says report

LONDON—Princess Diana was pregnant when she died in a Paris car crash in 1997 with her lover Dodi Fayed at her side, a London newspaper said Sunday, quoting "a senior police source in France."

"I can tell you that she was pregnant," the Independent on Sunday quoted the source as saying, in a dispatch from Paris splashed across the front page of its later editions.

However, the source dismissed suggestions that Diana, who divorced Prince Charles a year before her death, was the victim of a murder plot—a theory clung to by Fayed's father, Harrods department store tycoon Mohammed Al Fayed.

The anonymous source told the Independent on Sunday that there was "a cover-up of sorts" in the days following the Aug. 31, 1997 crash in Paris that claimed the life of Diana, 36, Fayed, 42, and driver Henri Paul.

Medical reports, never made public, showed Diana was pregnant, said the police source, who according to the Independent on Sunday "saw all the documents relating to the case."

The first inquests into Diana and Fayed's deaths ever to be held in Britain will open on Jan. 6, amid speculation that coroner Michael Burgess will touch upon some persisting conspiracy theories.

An official French investigation concluded that they were the victims of drunk driving at excessive speed with Paul, an employee of Al Fayed's Ritz Hotel in Paris, at the wheel.

Diana's bodyguard survived the crash with serious injuries, but he says he cannot remember anything of what happened.

Al Fayed, however, strongly suspects that the couple—for whom he has built a shrine in Harrods—were the victims of foul play.

He is currently awaiting a decision from a court in Edinburgh on whether an investigation can open in Scotland, where he has a country home. Scotland has a separate judicial system from the rest of Britain.

Diana was the mother of two children by Charles, Prince William and Prince Harry, who are second and third heirs after their father to the British throne now held by Queen Elizabeth.

Friends of Diana, as well as her former butler Paul Burrell, have strenuously denied that the princess was expecting her third child at the time of her death.

Coroners' inquests for Britons who die abroad are commonplace, but in the case of Diana and Fayed they could not begin before the completion of the French investigation, the Independent on Sunday said.

PRINCESS Diana in photo dated March 6, 1996. AFP

Meanwhile, the French state prosecutor has appealed against the acquittal of three photographers accused on invasion of privacy for taking shots of Princess Diana and her boyfriend Dodi Al Fayed on the night of their death six years ago, justice officials said Friday.

The three were cleared by a Paris court on Nov. 28 and the appeal was lodged shortly afterwards, the officials said.

It means the photographers—Fabrice Chassery, Jacques Langevin and Christian Martinez—will have to appear again before the appeals court. All have already been acquitted of involuntary homicide. *AFP*

Time names US soldier as 'Person of the Year'

NEW YORK—"The American Soldier" was named on Sunday as Time magazine Person of the Year, giving credit not to those who formulate the foreign policies of the United States but those who face bullets and grenades as they execute those policies.

There was little disagreement in Time's newsroom that the US-led war in Iraq was 2003's top story, Time Managing Editor Jim Kelly said. But he said there was a spirited debate about who would best represent that story as Person of the Year.

The American soldier was represented on the cover of Time by three helmeted and uniformed soldiers from an artillery survey unit of the US. Army's 1st Armored Division nicknamed the "Tomb Raiders" after being assigned the task of searching for weapons in a Baghdad cemetery.

The three were named as Sgt. Marquette Whiteside, 24, from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, SPC Billie Grimes, 26, from Lebanon, Indiana, a medic and the only female soldier in the unit, and Sgt. Ronald Buxton, 32, from Lake Ozark, Missouri.

US President George W. Bush and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld were candidates, but "the very messy aftermath of the war has made it clear that Washington's policy was going to have to be carried out day by day by the soldiers on the ground," Kelly said.

"We thought the title belonged to those people."

Time made a similar decision in 1950 when "The American Fighting-Man" got the title as the US waged war in Korea.

In Washington, Gen. Richard Myers, chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the selection was "just exactly right."

Myers last week visited US troops in Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan and Bahrain. "These folks look terrific. They understand the mission. They're confident in the mission," Myers told the "Fox News Sunday" program. "In many cases, it's the military that stands between the terrorists and their goal and they are doing a terrific job."

Kelly said Rumsfeld, in a November interview, made the unsolicited suggestion that this year's honor go to all men and women who wear the US uniform. *Reuters*

Thousands demonstrate vs French headscarf ban

PARIS—An estimated 3,000 women and men demonstrated in Paris on Sunday against French President Jacques Chirac's controversial pledge to back a government ban on the Islamic headscarf in state schools.

The crowd marched behind a banner reading "Headscarf, Cross, (Jewish) Kippa, leave us the choice," and chanted: "Devoted citizens, free citizens."

Other banners read "Beloved France, respect my freedom," and: "Frenchwoman and Muslim: not one or the other."

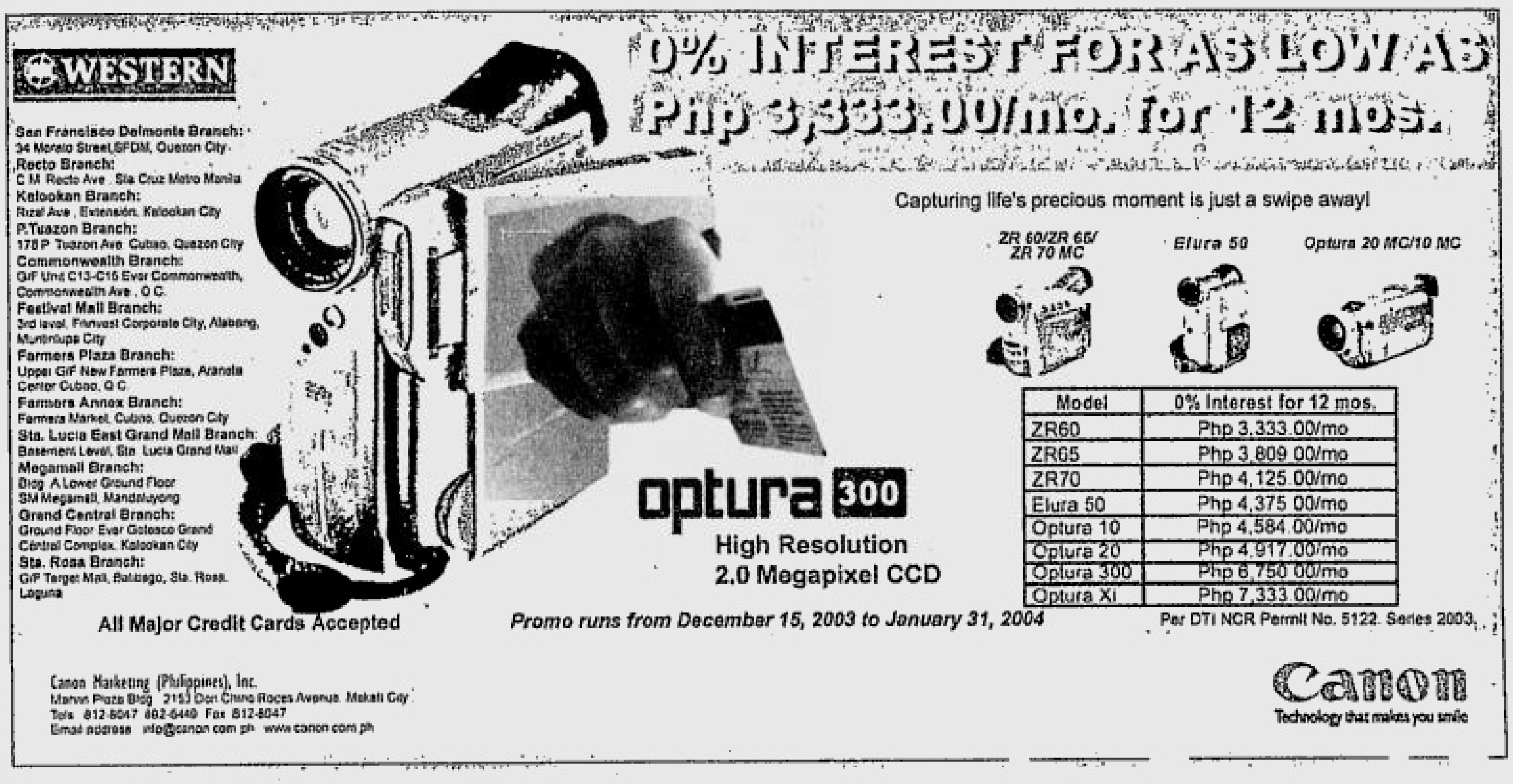
The crowd was divided in numbers more or less equally between men and women, with most women demonstratively wearing headscarves.

France has a Muslim population of some five million or about eight percent of the overall population.

The rally was organized following an appeal by two girl high school pupils from the Paris region aged 17 and 19, who stressed that no political group had been involved in preparing the demonstration.

Around 100 women wearing Islamic headscarves traveled to attend the rally from Lille and Tourcoing in the north of France aboard two special buses.

More than 600 people also demonstrated Saturday against the proposed legislation in the eastern city of Strasbourg, while several dozen protested in southeastern Avignon. *AFP*



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Ormoc all over again

EDITORIAL

IN NOVEMBER 1991, a Mindanao-based Australian ecologist said that for as long as Filipinos regard the earth and the environment as resources to be exploited and abused, a flood similar to that in Ormoc City that killed about 8,000 people could occur anytime. Twelve years later, his prediction came true, and in a place not far away from Ormoc City.

As this was being written, the death toll in the mudslides that ravaged several towns in Southern Leyte and the Caraga region in Mindanao had risen to 142 and was still rising. More than 100 other people were missing and believed dead.

Heavy rains, severe deforestation and the mountainous terrain were blamed for the fatal mudslides by Leny Ruiz, a government weather forecaster. She said that heavy deforestation reduced the capacity of the land to hold water. She recalled that before the deforestation of the area, there was no problem of flooding or landslides.

Time and again, government officials, and ecologists like the Australian Neil Fraser, program director of Populi Foundation, have issued warnings on the possibility of more disasters occurring because of the deforestation of mountains and watersheds. In 1991 then Leyte Gov. Leopoldo Petilla said illegal logging was largely to blame for the calamity in Ormoc. Then Cebu Gov. Emilio Osmeña said the main culprit was illegal logging. And Sen. Aquilino Pimentel was so incensed that he called for people power against illegal loggers who continued to denude the country's remaining forests.

The Ormoc disaster was front-page story for more than a week, but after the initial hue and cry, it receded from the public consciousness. The government and the people forgot about it. Now, the problem of deforestation is very much in the news again because of the disastrous mudslides in Southern Leyte and the Caraga region.

The Ormoc disaster caused some soul-searching in Japan. Newspaper editorials reflected the national spasm of guilt when they said Japan must shoulder part of the blame for the calamity because it is the world's biggest importer of tropical timber. Typical of the editorials was that of Asahi Shimbun which said that Japan should "accelerate aggressive use of our advanced expertise and money for repairing and restoring rain forests in Asia."

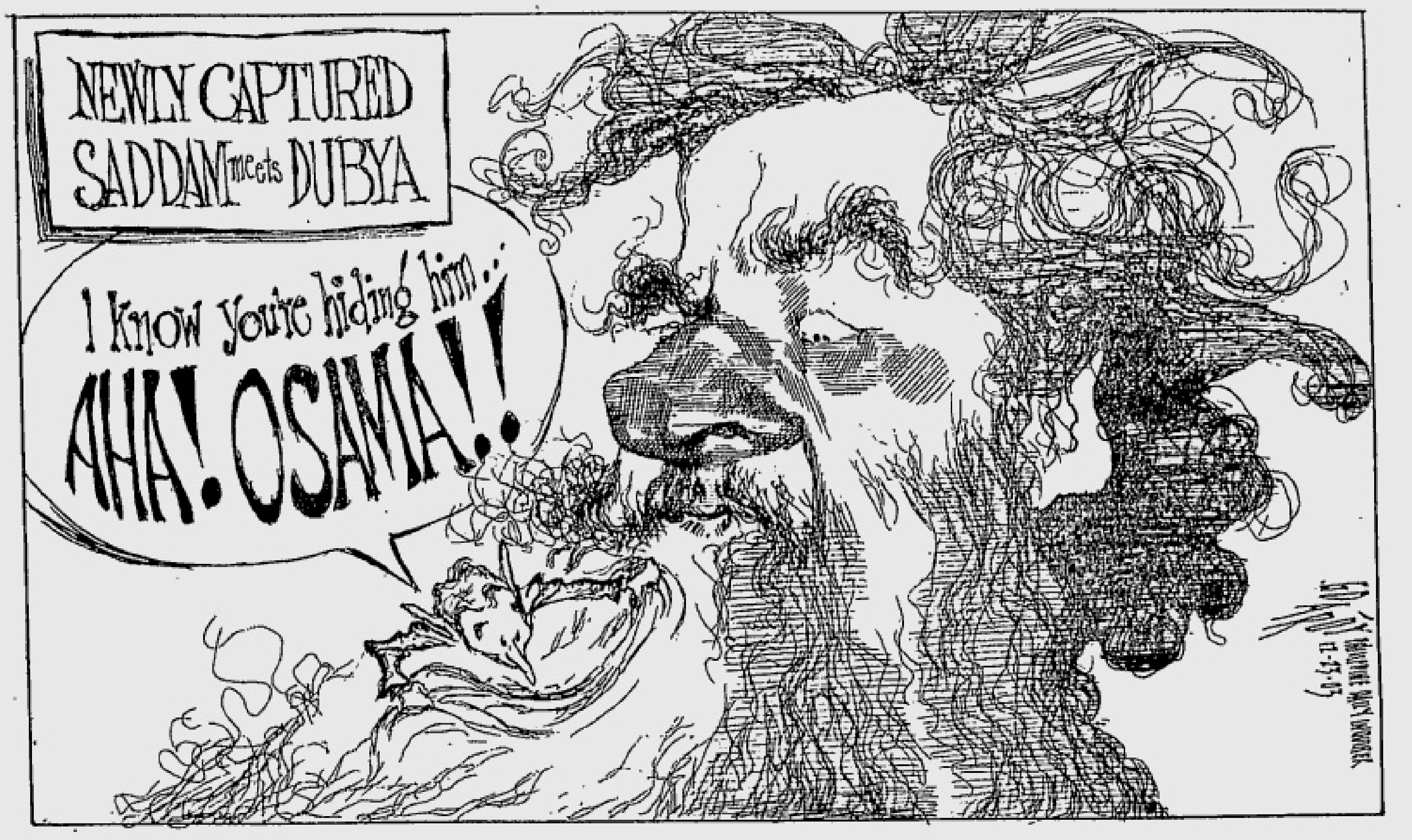
A good suggestion, but apparently nothing was done about it, because the deforestation in Southern Leyte and the Caraga region continued unabated. No large-scale reforestation effort was undertaken. Had a systematic reforestation program been undertaken in 1991, the trees would have been 12 years old now and of a size that would help retain water on the mountainsides and prevent landslides and mudslides.

A massive reforestation program throughout the country would help arrest the alarming denudation of its forests. The average rate of deforestation from 1989 to 1995 was 130,000 hectares a year; the 21 million hectares of forest in 1903 is estimated to have gone down to 5.4 million hectares at present.

Aside from undertaking a nationwide reforestation program, the government will have to intensify its drive against illegal logging. Violators have to be prosecuted and punished to the full extent of the law. Civil society can help stop illegal logging by conducting people power actions against the despoilers of the environment. It has been done before—in Bukidnon, for instance—with great impact and effect, and it can be done again.

But ultimately, the solution to the problem of deforestation will have to involve a change in the philosophy and outlook of all the people, including the illegal loggers. People have to look at the environment, including forests, as possessing life similar to man. Forests may be developed and used, but they also have to be sustained and cared for so that they can continue to serve future generations.

People have to realize that they are not simply users or exploiters of the environment. They have to act as stewards and managers of the earth; they have to care for and conserve the environment at the same time that they are using it. Perhaps if people, and especially government officials and businessmen and industrialists who depend on the environment for their raw materials, started thinking this way then we could prevent the occurrence of another Ormoc, or another Liloan, or another Caraga.



Loggers killed mudslide victims

As I See It

Neal H. Cruz

THE LANDSLIDES in Southern Leyte and Surigao City are the Ormoc tragedy all over again. Several days of heavy rains loosened the soil on the denuded mountainsides and mud and rocks whooshed down to engulf the houses below. In Leyte and Surigao, as in Ormoc, the loggers who cut down the trees on the mountains are to blame. Had the trees not been felled, their roots would have held the soil together, there would have been no mudslides, and the more than 100 people buried alive by the slides would still be alive today. The loggers murdered them.

The victims were careless in building their houses at the foot of steep hillsides and at the base of cliffs. Mountains and hills look massive and solid and indestructible but the force of gravity is always trying to pull them down and sooner or later it wins the tug of war. But being poor farmers, they didn't know any better. If educated people living in modern housing subdivisions in Metro Manila (like Cherry Hills in Antipolo) planned, supervised and built by professional engineers, can be victims of landslides, how much more uneducated farmers living in the hinterlands?

For centuries, humans liked to live on top of mountains. The view up there is magnificent. During the middle ages, castles, fortresses and monasteries were built on steep mountains. Aside from the view, the solitude and freedom from unwanted guests, they were easy to defend from an invading enemy.

In the modern age, the population crush, not just the view, forced humans to build their homes on mountainsides. Whole cities rose on what used to be hills and mountains. It is hardly noticeable, but the city of San Francisco in California was built on hills. But even here, in an age of steel and concrete and engineering marvels, gravity sometimes wins. Now and then whole neighborhoods on beautiful hillsides with magnificent views slide down to the lowlands below after days of heavy rains; houses, streets, trees, cars all tumbling down together in a cascade of mud and water.

Beach houses also have a magnificent view of the sea. Their occupants also can just step out of the front door to walk on the sand under the palm trees and go for a swim. But during typhoons and big waves, they can be swept away by the restless sea.

Homes beside rivers also have beautiful views, but during floods they can be inundated and even swept away.

The landslide victims of Ormoc, Southern Leyte and Surigao, as well as the squatters who built their shanties on the banks of *esteros*, creeks and rivers, can hardly be said to be after the magnificent views. They just happened to be the only available places for them. And they didn't realize the danger then. In the case of the farmers, the forests were probably still there when they built their houses. It was only later that the loggers began cutting the trees. Perhaps some of them were even hired to help cut the trees. And so nature had its revenge and some humans paid with their lives.

To prove my point, it should be noted that at least one family in Liloan, Southern Leyte, was saved by the trees they didn't cut. Baby Almoguerra of Barangay Poblacion said that gmelina and mahogany trees beside their house blocked the landslide that buried her neighbors. "If not for those trees," she said, "we would have been hit."

The moral of the story is this: Stop cutting trees. Plant trees instead. We can't insult nature and get away with it. Sooner or later, nature will have its revenge. Don't wait for it.

* * *

What is your Christmas wish? Almost everybody has one. I also have mine. Since I attended the Christmas party of the Philippine Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) at its animal rehabilitation center last Saturday, I have been thinking of the dogs and cats there. And my Christmas wish is for them to have a big lawn where they can romp and play and sun themselves.

There is still space at the back of the compound. If this is covered with soil and planted with grass and some trees, the dogs and cats can be let out there, at different hours, so they can run and play and soak themselves in the sun. It must be stifling, boring and tiring to stay in their cages. Even human prisoners who are paying for their sins against society are allowed a few hours in the sun, so why not innocent animals that have not done society any wrong but instead were the ones abused by humans?

The same lawn can be a petting zoo where children can pet ducks, geese, chicken, rabbits, goats and lambs to teach them to love animals.

I wish somebody or some association would gift PAWS with funds for the lawn. I also wish Meralco would increase the land loaned to it for a bigger lawn and petting zoo.

* * *

By the way, the same animal rehabilitation center also has a butterfly house, open to the public for a small fee, where you can see adult butterflies emerging from their pupae. Butterflies of all colors and sizes flit among plants and flowers in a beautifully landscaped garden with waterfalls, flowing streams and foot bridges.

The garden was designed by a volunteer couple named Romeo and Juliet (honest, those are their real names; that's probably why they fell in love with each other and now work together in perfect harmony).

Outside the butterfly garden, there is a small shop that sells assorted souvenir trinkets (as low as P15 a pair) with butterfly motifs. There are also specimen butterflies mounted in picture frames, singly or in groups. They're not only decorative, they're also educational.

New classics

There's the Rub

Conrado de Quiros

I KNOW I should have written about them earlier when I could have persuaded more people to buy them. These are a couple of new Christmas albums which are bound to become future classics. What can I say? The Filipino Christmas is the most hectic season of the year, a holiday you need a holiday from afterward. But it isn't too late to buy them, or order them; I don't quite know if they've hit the stands already. You can always play them well past the 25th—they're worth listening to anytime of the year. Since they're destined to become classics, you can have the consolation of dusting them off Christmas after Christmas and playing them for years to come. CDs, I understand, have a shelf life of more than 100 years.

The first is Noel Cabangon's "Noel," produced by the Jesuit Communications Foundation. You can always order from the foundation if you can't find the album in your favorite music shop, or pirate's lair. Friends have been telling me about the huge billboard along Edsa advertising the album, with Noel's picture on it, but I haven't yet seen it. I'm glad though that Noel has gotten this big, in more ways than one. It couldn't have happened to a nicer, and more deserving, guy.

The other album is Dangerous Inc.'s "Christmas Prayers." You can always order from them, too, if you can't find the album in the shops. Just don't ask me for directions, I'm lost too.

Noel's "Noel" has the added attraction of being magnificently designed. Which is as a Christmas card, the cover showing an artist's or child's (is there a difference?) scrawl of a thatched roof, a Christmas lantern and a guitar. I understand the drawing came from Noel's (and Beng's) son Gabriel, who did it as a class assignment. Truly, blessings tumble like a flood upon the good, a thought that should survive Christmas. Redone with the aid of a computer, and using software that may or may not have been bought at Virra Mall, the result is a thing of beauty. You can't give a better Christmas card this Christmas.

But the true blessing of this album is Noel himself. The songs were composed by the usual suspects at Loyola, the ones who gave you last year an album of religious music sung by Noel, too. I don't know if a heavenly star guided them to him, but their choice of singer is divinely inspired. Or maybe *pana-panahon lang 'yan*. Three songs are covers, "The First Noel," "Pasko na Sinta Ko" and "The Christmas Song" (or as some say, "The Chestnuts Song"), and the rest are original. But whether cover or original, Noel sings it with a lot of heart. You remember (because you tend to take it for granted hearing him sing all the time, particularly on Wednesdays at 70s Bistro) how good a singer he really is.

Most of the songs in this album are of the mold of the three covers, or such classics as "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" and "Little Christmas Tree," songs that hover between new and old, pop and carol. I haven't heard songs like these for some time, the quiet pensive kind, you have this image in your mind of someone musing alone on Christmas, alone but not lonely, his feelings bordering on the aching, his voice full of longing.

No one is better suited for the purpose than Noel. You can't have a more heavenly instrument. Most singers you have the feeling of addressing a crowd even when they are singing quiet songs, some others you have the feeling of addressing only you even when they are proclaiming their hurts to the world. Noel belongs to the second. I listened to the album last Saturday night, and I haven't felt this Christmasy in a long time.

"Christmas Prayers" is a little more varied, and rightly so because it has varied artists. It is the more "Filipino" in that sense, in the sense of *puto bumbong*, showering you with a burst of sound and colors, from the haunting strains of a solo guitar to the glorious blare of a marching band, from the glint of a solitary *parol* in the dark to the splay of multicolored *kakanin* by the churchyard during *Simbang Gabi*.

The songs are uniformly wondrous, the arrangements, the acoustical properties of the album, and the boundless musicality of the artists are a joy to hear. Noli Aurillo, a guitar genius, has done a fantastic job putting this project to bed, or to manger, however you want to put it. Special mention must be made of several songs. Chief of them is Cynthia Alexander's and Joey Ayala's "Ligaya," which showcases the siblings' awesome musical talents: they sing and play various ethnic instruments. Barbie Cristi has a nice song here, sung by Cooky Chua backed up by Color it Red. Cooky has one of the lushest—some may say, in more ways than one, but that is another story—voices in the business, and she gives the song a warm feeling, like a shot of spirits on a cold dark night.

Chikoy Pura takes time out from *rakenrol* to do a wistful song here called "Paskong Biyaya," accompanying himself on an acoustic guitar. I'm not surprised he does it so well, I've heard other compositions of his along these lines. I loved what Bo Razon has done to "Ang Pasko ay Sumapit," a thing that oscillates between jazz and Banda Malabon, the kind you hear on Christmas Day when you wake up to a trombone playing in the distance, signaling the approach of messiah and circus. But my (and my son's) favorite is Tropical Depression's "Pamaskong Alay Sa Yo, Neneng Ko." The song was originally composed by S. Suarez and Levi Celerio, musical giants both, but Papadom and his band have done wonders arranging it. They've turned it into reggae, and never has Jamaican sounded more Filipino, capturing as it does the laughter of the season and the race, amid trial and travail.

Move over Ray Conniff and Jingle Bell Jazz, make way for the new classics.

For Schwarzenegger, it's easier to fight robots

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

LOS ANGELES—I joined my husband on a business trip with two PNOC executives to nearby Irvine, about 30 miles from Los Angeles last week. We had flown via PAL from Manila and motored to Irvine along the Los Angeles Freeway, perhaps the nation's most famous highway. Wide and with very elaborate interchanges, the LA Freeway traffic, however, remains pretty bad just the same, and a little foul-up can tie up traffic for an hour and a half at times. The beauty of the Greater LA set-up, however, is that each county is fairly complete with its own malls, hotels and commercial centers so that people try to avoid downtown LA as much as they can because of the ghastly traffic (which is nothing compared to Manila's traffic).

Irvine and environs represent the new directions for outward movement from LA. One evening realtors Geny and John Uy, the sister and brother-in-law of Mely Parungao, wife of PNOC's executive vice president Fred Parungao, took us to the high-end shopping district in Newport Beach, called Fashion Island. It is a great place even for just window-shopping for choice goods.

* * *

Despite the traffic, we were able to convince two LA-based Filipinos, lawyer and insurance man Ric Guzman, a good family friend of Philippine Petrochemical Development Corp. president Jose Gangan from Ilocos Sur, and my youngest brother, Benjie Olivares, who's into promotions, to drive us to downtown LA on two separate occasions. Guzman took our group to Universal Studios to take in the fantasies of movie-making in Hollywood, and for a day we were like kids lost in wonderland. Benjie drove us to LA's wharf for a seafood lunch and then a visit to Venice Beach along the Pacific coast, which is the hub of artists and bohemians, and a major tourist spot even in winter. He also took us around Beverly Hills and LA's fabled high-end shopping district, Rodeo Drive, to take in the Christmas lights. In the Hollywood district, we got to watch with fascination as some movie stars gathered in their dazzling gowns and tuxedos at the famous Grauman's Chinese Theater for the premier of a movie starring Ben Affleck. For the star-struck, indeed nothing can quite match the mystique of LA even for just a night.

* * *

With movie king Fernando Poe Jr. set to run for president in May 2004, many Filipinos are doubtless wondering how "Terminator 2" action star-turned-politician Arnold Schwarzenegger has been doing since he was elected governor of California in a recent recall election. Well, it seems that reality has set in and from what I gather, Californians are now realizing that between the campaign promises and the delivery, there is a world of difference. The new governor is having such a tough time tackling the biggest problem of California, the world's fifth largest economy, which is its gargantuan budgetary deficit. Where to get the funds to close the yawning fiscal gap is his king-size headache.

In fairness to Schwarzenegger, he didn't cause the deficit. Many previous administrations were responsible for it. But some Californians say his inexperience is beginning to show, and in fact some Democrats are said to be floating the idea of recalling Schwarzenegger this time.

* * *

The large immigrant blocs in California are upset over Schwarzenegger's first move, which was to revoke the ruling of defeated Gov. Grey Davis to allow illegal aliens to acquire driver's licenses. Davis had argued that if he did not allow them to get that license, the more these aliens would be a burden to the state. The thing to do was to control illegal entrants at the source, Davis said. Schwarzenegger revoked his predecessor's ruling. The Filipinos here are also upset as he also removed the state subsidy given to Filipino veterans.

Moreover he revoked the triple tax on car registration, which his predecessor had slapped in order to raise about $4 billion in revenues for the independent cities to finance their welfare programs. This vehicle tax used to be a major source of funds for the state. Before the recall election, Schwarzenegger had assured the mayors that they need not worry about additional funding even without the triple car tax. He said he would provide the additional funds even if they were to come from his own pocket (he makes about $25 million per film). But soon after he took his oath, he told them to start looking for their own funds.

* * *

Eighteen counties so far have signified their intention to file a lawsuit to force the state to return the state license fees that have been abolished. To help assuage the discontent among local officials, Schwarzenegger promised to return to them $2.6 billion of the lost $4 billion from the triple car taxes. But the problem is that there is the feeling that his plan would eventually mean cutting more money for the poor.

The governor used his new powers to trim 5 percent from the budget, amounting to $150 million, but $104 million of that cut will come from allocations for higher education, affecting such institutions as the gigantic University of California and California State University. Another $140,000 will be cut from farmworker housing and $1.9 million from state child support services. Schwarzenegger has appealed to the state legislature to approve $1.9 billion in additional cuts but the lawmakers refuse to act, doubtless because they are facing an election in November 2004. This has forced the former megastar to assert, "I will have to act without them."

It's obvious that the Terminator finds it easier to battle the robots than California's gargantuan budget deficit.

In gratitude

AT LARGE

Rina Jimenez-David

A "FELLOWSHIP of Nitpickers," I understand, has arisen from among the ranks of both "Lord of the Rings" fanatics and plain movie know-it-alls. Now that the third of the film trilogy has been released, there has been no shortage of criticism about the movie's flaws and bloopers, and even about JRR Tolkien's novels, primarily the author's lack of strong female characters and his awkward handling of the romantic side of life.

Frankly, this is something that Tolkien's readers have long known and reconciled themselves with. To read the three "LOTR" books for the romance, after all, is like searching for plot and character in an "XXX" video.

By "romance" I mean the boy-meets-girl sort, of course. For there is plenty of romance in the Tolkien oeuvre, if by romance you mean drama and soaring emotion, grandeur and grand aspirations, lofty ambitions, nobility and bravery, purity and innocence, and a life-and-death struggle with the fate of humanity, no less, hanging in the balance.

One approaches "Lord of the Rings," particularly the final volume, "The Return of the King," with enough knowledge to be aware of the epic's limitations, but also with anticipation and dread. As Gandalf said at the end of the Battle of Helm's Deep, "we have won a battle but the war is not yet won." The portents look good for the side of the "Fellowship." Isengard, the rogue wizard Saruman's domain, has been laid to waste by Treebeard and his army of Ents (with the help of two plucky hobbits), Rohan has been saved, and most important, Frodo and Sam have been seen alive and have made their way to Mordor.

But there is still danger and impending doom. Gondor, the kingdom nearest Mordor, remains under threat, the steward overtaken by madness and grief. The Elven kingdoms have lost their best warriors, and have decided to abandon Middle Earth for their Grey Havens. And Gollum, forever pining for his "precious," is plotting a dreadful end indeed for his Hobbit traveling companions.

* * *

BY NOW, after two "LOTR" films, the movie-going public is familiar enough with the saga of Middle Earth as to lose all reverence and awe for its fascinating characters. Tolkien's take on brotherhood and loyalty, especially the bonds between Frodo and Sam, is sent up as a homoerotic tendency. The beautiful elven royalty, Arwen and Galadriel, are scrutinized for sappy dialogue and all-too-human features. And Legolas, so luminous a presence in "Fellowship of the Ring," is brought down a notch for what some suspect is a hidden desire for Aragorn.

Fortunately, other characters rise to the occasion and in "Return of the King," it is Aragorn's turn to capture the popular imagination. Viggo Mortensen's presence turns larger-than-life in this final film, which is, after all, all about his character and how he transforms from Strider, the enigmatic Ranger, to claim his rightful place as King of Gondor, heir of Isildur, nemesis of Sauron the Dark Lord.

* * *

WHILE some might find Arwen undeserving of her over-extended role in the movie, Eowyn, the Rohan noblewoman who dons a warrior's garb to fight alongside the men, receives rightful prominence. I remember rooting for Eowyn to be Aragorn's beloved while in the midst of reading the trilogy, and with just one line justified my heroine-worship. Warned by the Witch King, leader of the Ringwraiths, that "no man can kill me," she whips off her helmet and declares, "I am no man!" before thrusting her sword into his dark maw.

The last film in the trilogy also gives the Hobbits, particularly Pippin and Merry, a chance to rise above their cuddly personas, proving themselves worthy warriors alongside humans, elves, dwarves and even the "undead." But if we're giving away "LOTR" acting awards, one surely has to go to Sean Astin as Samwise Gamgee, who manages to imbue his one-dimensional character with humanity and rises above his cliché-filled lines. Elijah Wood also fulfills the promise of his early films, Frodo's pain and loneliness, fear and doggedness communicated mainly through his expressive eyes.

* * *

WHY watch "Return of the King"? One watches mainly to find out how the saga ends, I suppose. Though even Tolkien was reportedly so reluctant to bid his characters and his created world of Middle Earth goodbye that he felt constrained to add further chapters to this heroic tale.

But one watches also to bring this story, so magnificently, heroically translated into film, to closure. One watches the last of the film trilogy to pay homage to Peter Jackson and his collaborators for their vision and dedication to it, to pursuing for four long years the transmutation of Tolkien's imagination into reality, into the creation of a Middle Earth inhabited by living, breathing humans, ents, elves, wizards, orcs, dwarves, dragons and fearful oliphaunts.

While sitting through "Return of the King," one feels a whole diverse menu of emotions: awe, reverence, tenderness, fear, repugnance, anger, relief. But what I felt at the end of it was mainly gratitude. Gratitude to Jackson and his team for staying faithful to the spirit of the books, for resisting the temptation to play up to modern sensibilities and their disdain for what is grand and noble. Gratitude to the actors for striking not a single false note in their characters, staying faithful to the spirit that animated them in the first place. And gratitude, finally, that "Lord of the Rings" has resonated with a wider audience than even the books through the decades had reached. All these years, those of us who love Tolkien's saga of Middle Earth have treated the story as our own little treasure. Now that story has been told to the rest of the world, and the world stands a little taller, a little nobler, knowing it.

Good behavior

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

Bambi L. Harper

OKAY, in the spirit of Christmas and so on, I have resolved to behave for a week and not say mean and nasty things—even if true—about our wretched leaders. (After Jan. 1, all bets are off.) Oops. Let me re-start. In the spirit of Christmas, let us speak of other things like traditions we keep without really knowing why or whence they originated. A friend said it sounded like sermonizing but it's better than being nasty.

The Church as we know it is a funny institution. Turns out caroling dates back to ancient times and refers to dancing or singing songs of praise and happiness. People used to do this all seasons of the year, but when Dec. 25 was designated as Christ's birthday, many of the secular songs were adapted for songs celebrating the birth.

The Church hierarchy frowned upon these pagan songs and squelched them for nearly 2,000 years. Carols were not to be sung at home or on the streets. Church music, being written in Latin (that few understood) and rarely melodic, didn't catch on with the general population. Thus, Christmas in the Middle Ages with no heating, little light and no carols could not have been too joyous a celebration

It took an Italian and a saint to begin to alter the situation. We owe the manger scene, which is so beloved and symbolic of the season, to St. Francis, who in 1223 constructed a Nativity scene outside his church. Children were invited to view it and to sing Christmas songs that St. Francis taught them in their own language (Italian) instead of Latin. Understanding the meaning made the children more enthusiastic. It is possible they were the first real carolers.

With time, St. Francis' Nativity plays grew more ornate and the songs became so popular that they soon spread throughout Europe. The fact that the event took place outside a church made it a secular celebration and people adapted the melody of folk songs, with amateur musicians composing Christmas songs with familiar tunes that people could learn quickly.

Church leaders were not happy because some were old drinking songs and were not theologically correct. Good thing though that people ignored attempts to ban the songs, and soon minstrels picked up the carols in their travels and entertained their audiences with these songs during December. Locals learned them from these troubadours and sang them in their homes, while children would sing them in street corners to raise money. Despite their popularity, the Church remained unconvinced, worried that they were losing control of the faith.

Martin Luther adapted the carols though and sang them with his congregation. In 1741, Handel composed "Messiah" and even the hierarchy was impressed. When a priest named Joseph Mohr and a school teacher named Gruber composed "Silent Night" in 1818, the Church finally accepted carols. (By the way "Silent Night" is the most recorded song in history.)

But it was Queen Victoria's marriage to German Prince Albert that really changed the British celebration of Christmas. The prince, it seems, was a great lover of caroling and once the press reported that the royal family loved holiday music, many families and groups went to the palace to serenade. Soon carolers were going all over London singing Christmas songs.

In time not only England but the rest of Europe heard carols being sung and churches of all denominations used them at Christmas services. It wasn't the Catholics though who popularized it in America but the Methodists and then the Lutherans, who not only introduced them into worship services but organized street carolers.

The message of these songs is, of course, love and peace; they connected with the Baby in the manger in a way that no sermon could, bringing goodwill to all who heard them since the carolers were not doing it for money but the sheer joy of singing. Most of these songs were created in the second half of the 19th century and carried the world through wars when peace seemed unattainable.

There is a story that during the Franco-Prussian War on Christmas Eve, a French soldier leapt out of his foxhole in the midst of battle and started singing "O Holy Night." Others soon joined him and all gunfire ceased. The Germans began a carol of their own and for one day the battle stopped. In 1914, a Christmas truce was called during World War I. During this period both sides helped bury the dead, exchanged gifts and sang carols.

Perhaps it's our brave new world that gives us little time to enjoy simple pleasures and life has become more urban than rural. Recorded carols are heard as early as September to the irritation of many who see it as nothing but a commercial ploy. Christmas music and its celebration lose the spirit and become mundane.

Yet there is a message for all of us here in the midst of the corruption and killing. As the poet said, we must love one another or die.

May I wish you then in all sincerity the peace and love of the Christ Child not just for the season but the year round.

(Data from A. Collins, "Great Traditions of Christmas.")

Burying Christmas

I WILL be spending Christmas alone. This Yuletide Season, I will not be in my home province of Antique. I will stay in Manila and try to live the days in solitude and contemplation while I wait for the resumption of classes and the start of the new year.

This may be the loneliest Christmas Season I will have, but I have chosen to spend it that way. I would be more surprised if my Christmas would be happy. Besides, I can barely recollect any happy Christmases except when I gaze into old photographs and hear echoes of long-lost laughter and conversations from the past.

YOUNG BLOOD

Hannah Eloisse V. Go

We want to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We welcome contributions from the twentysomething and below.—Ed.

Honestly since I was 13, I never liked Christmas. Maybe I am bitter, but the way society dictates how everyone should spend Christmas is excruciatingly asphyxiating. Our culture demands that Christmas be happy. And for it to be happy, it must be spent with the whole family.

Of course, Christmas must also be marked with profligacy. There simply is no other way to celebrate it.

But these standards are unfair to those who are condemned or fated to spend it differently. If everyone has to celebrate Christmas, why not make it friendlier to those who would likely have what the majority would call a "dysfunctional Christmas"? It causes so much pressure and frustration, and they dearly call it the Filipino Christmas. Heck, maybe I should give up my citizenship.

Let's have a reality check, everyone. Somebody has to change those incredible standards. Not everyone in this ailing country has a so-called "complete" family. Why make us feel unhappy if we can't gather everyone in the family on this particular day? Considering the significant number of migrants, overseas workers and broken homes in our time, being able to spend Christmas together is a considerable feat.

We are being torn asunder by the realities of our humanity. There are people who feel lonely. Let us not make them feel lonelier because they cannot have an "ideal" Christmas.

And please, read the newspapers sometimes. Have you ever heard of inflation? Have you ever felt the shrinking value of the peso that quickly slips out of your pocket? Money vanishes quickly from our sight and creeps so slowly into our pocket, reinforcing your suspicion that money is a vicious creep.

Not too long ago, while riding the FX, my friend and I heard that the prices of basic goods would rise and make you reach for the coins you stashed away somewhere. Great, so how's Christmas going to be then?

If you don't care, you must be really rich. If you do, you belong to the majority who has to save and scrimp to afford that *lechon* or *queso de bola*.

Another headache-inducing feature of Christmas this year is the approach of the circus-like spectacle called "national elections." Fantastic. Expect a multitude of candidates to shake your hands and a deluge of propaganda materials more romantic and fantastic than the latest telenovela. Let us hear them promise heaven and earth. The hype has already started, and I really fear that we may have another actor as president, which in my opinion makes a mockery of the critical capacity of our people.

So how are we going to spend Christmas? Playing dumb and blind to the realities that make the young people like me jaded and skeptical? Somebody, please share some hope. Our generation is running low on humor.

I want to spend Christmas alone. Though I will miss my family, I also know that Christmases aren't always beautiful and picture-perfect like the ones one sees in commercials and movies. Let me grow up this season. The loneliness will feed my yearning for the meaning of my existence and make me look away from unattainable ideals. Let me touch the realities. This Christmas is a battle. I will soon be an adult, and I will soon clutch in my hand pieces of the world and fashion them into something worth celebrating.

I lovingly buried Christmas in my subconscious a long time ago. Gray is my favorite color. Just let me survive this and the coming days.

Hannah Eloisse V. Go, 21, is a BA Art Studies senior at the University of the Philippines, Diliman. She loves photographs, music, reading, watching the sunrise and sunset, spending time with people she likes and playing shrink sometimes.

THEY SAID

Christ and drugs

"How could one continue to receive Christ in the sacraments when the same Christ had already been banished from one's heart through this illegal and gravely immoral trade?"

—Cebu Archbishop Ricardo Cardinal Vidal advising those in the illegal drug trade not to receive communion

Passing 2004 budget

"Applying the old spending law is like endorsing a blank check to the (Macapagal) administration."

—Sen. Edgardo Angara saying there is still time to pass the 2004 budget

I quit

"It's final, I quit politics and leave this miserable country all because of the looming presidency of movie actor Fernando Poe Jr."

—Davao Oriental Councilor Noel Sibala

Bringing out the best

"As many of you know, Ninoy (Benigno Aquino Jr.) was not the perfect husband as I was not the perfect wife, but somehow with many, many prayers, much love and dedicated efforts, we were able to bring out the best in each other."

—Former President Corazon Aquino

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Vengeful nature?

PINOY KASI

Michael L. Tan

THERE'S something about that word "deforestation" being over-used, especially whenever we have disasters like this last deadly one in Southern Leyte and Surigao.

Don't get me wrong. I totally agree that the country is rapidly becoming deforested and that this is a major cause of our floods and landslides. But I feel uneasy about the word because it is impersonal and distant, too easy to invoke.

When we hear the word we think, in passing, of illegal logging, which itself is still an abstraction (we can almost hear the chainsaws bringing down the trees but that's about it). We suspect big-time businessmen backed by politicians and the military, and shrug our shoulders—they're untouchable, there's nothing we can do.

Disasters always bring out the need for explanations. We mourn with the relatives over the bloated, muddied corpses, read the headline, "Deforestation blamed," and feel some catharsis. Note, too, how all this talk of deforestation is accompanied by metaphoric accounts of Mother Nature getting back at us, spiteful and destructive.

But, wait, there's something wrong somewhere here. It seems nurturing Mother Nature has run amuck. The bloody toll in lives isn't one of illegal loggers but of impoverished villagers, of old *lolos* and *lolas*, of infants, of high school students about to graduate in a few months, including one class valedictorian.

It's time we seriously look at the people, at the web of power relations, behind deforestation. The illegal loggers aren't just businessmen backed by politicians; all too often, we know the politicians are themselves illegal loggers. Power allows them to strip down the mountains.

Ironically, deforestation occurs as well because of disempowerment. I am talking here about the link between poverty and deforestation. Deforestation occurs when the poor are deprived of land and are forced to move from the lowlands toward areas around mountains and, eventually, to the mountain slopes. Besides the public lands available for cultivation, there is the attraction of trees, a ready source of timber for housing, for fuel.

Many upland areas were originally occupied by cultural minority groups, who are themselves now displaced by lowland settlers. Unlike the cultural minority groups, the new migrants often have little knowledge of upland ecology and will quickly deplete the resources in their new environment.

I say all this not to blame deforestation on the poor. The problem lies in governance and our public policies, from the coddling of politician-loggers to land-grabbing to the neglect of our farmers' needs for agricultural production. I could go on and on, even linking deforestation to our energy policies. I was struck by an INQUIRER story about one family being saved from the landslides because they were protected by trees they had planted in front of their house. From the species named (gmelina), I know this was part of a tree-replanting campaign. I can imagine the other homes that may have planted trees but eventually cut them down for firewood. Unless we seriously look into energy, including the use of alternatives such as solar power, many rural families will have to continue taking down the trees.

The tragedy in Southern Leyte and Surigao reminds me, too, of the total absence of a recognition, among our policymakers, of the link between population and environment issues.

In the last 10 years it has become politically incorrect to talk about "over-population." Family planning is promoted mainly as an issue of household economics. We thus hear people rationalizing, "Oh, if a couple can afford it, then let them go ahead and have eight children." Never mind that eight children places a greater strain not just on the biological mother, but on society and Mother Nature as well.

For those opposed to family planning, "over-population" is an even uglier word. There is no population problem, they argue. In fact, a large population is good for the economy because that means more consumers to fuel the growth of the Gross National Product. Never mind the question of providing health and education and all the other services that these consumers need.

And our natural resources? Oh, the anti-family planning groups will argue that we still have unused and bountiful mountains, forests, rivers and seas all around us. Sure, show them to me in Southern Leyte and in Surigao.

We need to go beyond slogans like "Save the forests." Tell that to the impoverished farmer who sees the uplands as agricultural land, as a source of fuel. In the same token, you can't hector this impoverished farmer about planning his family. He sees more children as extra hands to survive day to day, and in his old age, to have people to care for him. The numbers of our poor will continue to grow and each generation, neglected by society, will move further upland, trying to survive on what's left behind by illegal loggers, until the mountains come crashing down again.

Deforestation is too convenient a term to use. Even some of the politician-loggers will themselves blame deforestation, knowing that in a few days, election fever will once again take over and we will forget Liloan, San Francisco, San Ricardo, Pintuyan and Surigao City, much like we did Ormoc, Cherry Hills (Antipolo), and Payatas (Quezon City).

If we must insist on using metaphors, I have to say nature isn't vengeful at all. It's amazing to see how much abuse she takes before she finally gives up. In the end, she doesn't lash out in fury; instead, she cries out in despair as the remaining trees, and helpless people, are swept up and thrown, lifeless, back into her embrace. It's not deforestation, it's not nature that kills. It's people.

* * *

Comments to miguel@pinoykasi.net

Ngayong Pasko.
Siguruhing makararating
Ang inyong sulat at regalo.
Sa tulong ng
PHILPOST,
ipaabot kina
Nanay, Tatay,
Ate, Kuya, Baby,
Lolo at Lola
ang inyong pagbati
at pagmamahal.
Dahil sa PHILPOST,
ang inyong sulat at regalo,
Rated GMA:
Garantisadong
Makararating
Agad.
RATED GMA
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How Papa prepared for Christmas

LIKE participating in a sacred ritual, my three siblings and I would eagerly watch our father gather bamboo sticks, shape them with his jungle bolo and string them together into one and a half by one foot in diameter five-cornered frames. And he would make four of these every time.

This was our first reading in the book of seasons that Christmas has come, and Papa was preparing for the Great Visitor with the full acceptance of one so grateful.

He was readying his lanterns.

Before us, he'd painstakingly cover the frames with red and green Japanese paper, the only colors that, for him, really define the season.

Of course, he'd allow us to give a hand by doing small errands. Handing over the scissors or the string, holding up the paper or heating the paste. All these were sweet labor to us and for once our endless chattering selves became still in awe with what was taking shape before us like a quiet prelude before the Gospel.

After attaching the ornately designed tails of the lanterns, Papa would hang them in chosen places with us following in a procession. But the eucharistic high was in the lighting of the candles.

How we would clap our hands in the sheer joy of standing under the red and green lights in our small yard and bathing in their glow. Our playmates would come and join us in the grand opening of Papa's show every Dec. 16, which was also his birthday.

Papa did not only provide us the nightly visuals for Christmas but he also gave us the audio background with his baritone singing, "Oh holy night, the stars are brightly shining," all through our waking hours. He was a one-man choir in the concelebrated act of lantern-making.

That's why whenever I see a lantern of Papa's design, I likewise hear the accompanying song and I play it over and over in my mind and then I can't help the tears from welling in my eyes.

Since childhood until the time that each of us flew the coop to start our families, we had Papa's lanterns every Christmas. While other children look forward to Christmas trees and caroling, we would look forward to *parol*-making.

Papa left this world years ago but his lanterns remain in our hearts and faithfully light our way through life. And when the going gets very rough at times, we look at the stars brightly shining and in that familiar baritone, we hear him again, and get a sense of hope.

And though Christmas lights come very cheap nowadays and houses and trees blink in different shapes and colors, we still don't have a single series of Christmas lights strung in our hardware store where we also stay despite the fact that we sell them.

I searched in my heart of hearts to understand the heaviness at decorating our place with Christmas lights, I didn't know that I was longing for a beautiful tradition of the hand-made one-colored, one-and-a-half-foot-long lanterns complete with candles that used to light my childhood.

Tomorrow, I will buy bamboo sticks for my lanterns.

—FLOR S. TEMPLE,
Lower Jassan,
Misamis Oriental

Lacson never admitted guilt in Kuratong case

I WRITE in reaction to Solita Monsod's Nov. 29, 2003 column, titled "Still breathtaking."

Monsod claims Sen. Panfilo Lacson admitted to having killed suspected Kuratong Baleleng gang members and that he asserted having done so in self-defense.

Monsod did not check her facts. As counsel for Lacson in the Kuratong Baleleng cases since their inception in 1995, I know that the records of the cases plainly show that Lacson never admitted having directed or participated in the incident which led to the death of the Kuratong Baleleng suspects. He also did not plead self-defense. Instead, he had always pled innocence stating that he never gave the order to shoot, and that the men who were present at Commonwealth Avenue were not his men from the defunct Presidential Anti-Crime Commission. This fact resulted in the dismissal of the cases against him when they were first evaluated by the Ombudsman in 1995 (Blancaflor panel).

When that dismissal resolution was elevated to Deputy Ombudsman Francisco Villa for review, Lacson was again found not to have ordered or participated in the incident but he was nonetheless charged as an accessory to murder for the supposed "cover-up" of the killings because of the After Operation Report that he and the other senior police officers had filed on the incident. Ombudsman Aniano Desierto approved this resolution. The "new" witnesses recycled by the prosecution to persecute Lacson when the cases were revived in 2001 also confirmed that Lacson was nowhere near Commonwealth Avenue, that it was not his men who fired at the suspects, and that he did not give an order to kill those suspects. As regards the suspects being under surveillance, Monsod again did no research. They were being pursued by the police when they (police) were first fired upon. The police officers involved (not Lacson or his men) had three eyewitnesses to that effect, hence, the Blancaflor dismissal resolution.

Monsod also wrote about the delay in the bail application of the accused in the Justice Jun Valerio murder case. She claims I, as the Valerio family counsel, was given much leeway by Judge Theresa Yadao thereon. Monsod may have forgotten that I filed a petition against her for indirect contempt for writing a totally misleading article about the case. The records will show that the cause for the delay was the lengthy cross-examination and re-cross conducted by counsel for the accused herself. I believe the denial of my contempt charge against Monsod for her interference in that case (after due proceedings and after the INQUIRER provided her with counsel) was "leeway" given her by Judge Yadao. This, Monsod forgets.

—PHILIP SIGFRID A. FORTUN,
Fortun Narvasa Salazar,
23/F Multinational
Bancorporation Centre,
6805 Ayala Avenue, Makati City

Appeal from a disenfranchised voter

I AM a disenfranchised voter! On behalf of Filipinos residing and working overseas, we ask for immediate intervention or assistance on this matter.

We also ask the Supreme Court to issue a "writ of certiorari" for the Commission on Elections' violation of Republic Act 7166, Section 9, to wit:

"There shall be a registration of voters on the fifteenth Saturday (31 Jan. 04) before the day of elections for voters who will reach the age of 18 years on or before the day of the election or for those who are qualified but not registered in the list of voters. However, the Commission may designate an additional date of registration in certain areas to ensure voters therein are not deprived of their right of suffrage."

Instead, the Comelec has shortened our registration period to Sept. 30, 2003 instead of Jan. 31, 2004. The Comelec has fiduciary responsibilities to adequately provide our right to suffrage. The act further dictates that "additional dates of registration" may be designated so as not to disenfranchise voters.

Does the Comelec now have the power to legislate new election laws?

According to a Nov. 24, 2003 Wall Street Journal article, "Filipinos abroad send around $7 billion home a year, or roughly 9% of the country's gross domestic product." Yet, the Comelec has prohibited our rights to suffrage with its latest ruling.

Bottom line, we are Filipino citizens and we have reacquired all the rights and privileges set forth in RA 7166. One of the most important parts of the act is the Repeal Clause of Section 8, to wit: "Decrees, orders, rules and regulations inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are thereby repealed or modified accordingly."

—R. SONNY SAMPAYAN,
rsonny@myaetherbb.com

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Rights body to set up office in ARMM

GENERAL SANTOS CITY—Finally, the national government has seen the need to put up a human rights body in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

Presidential Assistant for Mindanao Jesus Dureza announced recently that programs were being drawn up for the setting up of a Human Rights Commission (HRC) in the ARMM area.

Based on data collated by the Moro Human Rights Center Inc. (MHRCI), ARMM, which was created in 1990, was among the areas in the country where there was big number of human rights violations.

Thirteen years after its creation, HRC is coming to the ARMM.

Dureza said the Office of the Presidential Assistant for Mindanao (Opmin) had recently signed a contract with the HRC for the establishment of a human rights office in the ARMM area.

ARMM covers the provinces of Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Maguindanao and the city of Marawi.

The program, Dureza said, would include, among others, ARMM human rights commission's office, personnel and training.

The establishment of a human rights office in the ARMM would address rampant human rights abuses in the area.

MHRCI claimed in its report that unlawful arrest and illegal detention of Muslim civilians were rampant particularly during the all-out war against terrorism by the Macapagal administration.

The same group claimed that more than 100 Muslim civilians in Basilan were either arrested, held or tortured by government soldiers on mere suspicion that they were members or sympathizers of the Abu Sayyaf.

More than half of those illegally arrested were later released after the government forces could not find enough evidence to support their accusations. *Aquiles Z. Zonio, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

NDF CLARIFICATION

No peace negotiations next year

LUCENA CITY—The National Democratic Front said there won't be any resumption of peace talks with the government next month.

According to the official paper of the Communist Party of the Philippines, Ang Bayan, the NDF said there are no formal discussions with the administration of President Macapagal-Arroyo on the peace talks.

"What transpired last October and November were all just informal preliminary meetings between the NDF and (government) peace panels," said the communist publication.

The clarification appeared on page 3 of the publication's Dec. 21 issue that was furnished the INQUIRER yesterday.

The NDF said it made the clarification in reaction to repeated announcements by the Philippine peace panel that the formal round of peace negotiations will resume next month.

The government's peace panel has been declaring that the formal peace negotiations with the communist rebels will resume January next year after a long recess, which consisted of several exploratory meetings and back-channel talks since June 2001.

While the NDF admitted that there had been important talks between the two panels, "no official accord has been agreed upon."

In the report, the NDF said the Macapagal administration desperately wanted to show that there was progress in the peace talks.

The NDF, political arm of the communist insurgents, said the administration wants to capitalize on the supposed advances of the peace negotiations in the face of the President's diminishing chance of victory in the coming elections.

The NDF said it was ready to resume peace negotiations with the government in accordance with The Hague Joint Declaration of 1992 and subsequent agreements.

The NDF, however, said the government should not insist on a "final peace agreement," which it described as a one-sided document.

The seven-man government panel headed by former Justice Secretary Silvestre Bello III met the 11-man NDF negotiating team chaired by Luis Jalandoni and Jose Ma. Sison during the recent informal and exploratory talks held in Oslo, Norway in November.

Discussed during the meeting, according to the report, was the "terrorist listing" of the Communist Party of the Philippines, New People's Army and Sison.

But Malacañang is not inclined to remove the terrorist tag after stressing that it has nothing to do with the listing. The Philippine peace panel, according to "Ang Bayan," just pledged to resort to legal, political and diplomatic avenues to break the impasse and also to secure the safety of the NDF panel and staff. *Delfin T. Mallari Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

BING GONZALES/PDI MINDANAO BUREAU

TRADITION
The faithful flock to churches nationwide for the traditional nine-day series of Masses leading to Christmas Day. In Toril, Davao City worshippers are welcomed to the church by lighting designed to highlight a Nativity scene at the church's entrance.

Power co-ops seen to seek IPP offers

BAGUIO CITY—The Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) accused the managers of more than 100 rural electric cooperatives (RECs) of duplicity for deliberately resisting the power utilities' conversion into stock cooperatives to appease potential buyers.

The Philippine Cooperatives Code mandates all cooperatives, including RECs, to obtain a stock-sharing character to protect its members.

But the 2001 Electric Power Industry Reform Act (Epira) allowed the National Electrification Administration (NEA) full supervisory control over the RECs' corporate structure to guarantee that their power distribution functions would not be diluted once the whole power industry is fully deregulated by 2006.

A case study drawn up by CDA Chair Ruben Conti proved that the conversion of RECs into stock institutions would not jeopardize its revenues from rural electrification.

"But we believe many RECs are resistant because they want to be bought out by bigger (power industry players like the independent power producers)," said Martin Manodon, CDA spokesperson for the Cordillera.

Buy-out

He said a few REC boards of directors see a windfall in benefits from a buy-out deal, which an ordinary stock cooperative or stock corporation would need to work for once the power system is deregulated.

"The buy-out will gurantee (the directors or managers) their tenure and a share in the profits, but it won't save the members, whose ownership of their stake in the cooperative is uncertain," Manodon said.

"A membership certificate is not as solid as a stock certificate, and a buy-out could mean the member loses all hold over the cooperative," he said.

He claimed that many REC managers have been "twisting" the facts about conversion whenever they held their individual assemblies, in a bid to delay the RECs' conversion.

Manodon said the CDA released its study to the INQUIRER following a "disappointing" meeting with the Association of Philippine Electric Cooperatives (Apec).

He said almost all of the RECs representing Luzon appeared hostile to the conversion option, although several RECs from the Visayas and Mindanao were more open to this option.

The CDA studied the San Jose Electric Cooperative (Sajelco) in Nueva Ecija, the Camarines Norte Electric Cooperative (Canoreco), the Sorsogon Electric Cooperative (Soreco), the Albay Electric Cooperative (Aleco II), the Negros Electric Cooperative (Noreco II) and the Davao del Norte Electric Cooperative (Daneco).

Fiscal targets

All these RECs exceeded their fiscal targets after enlisting with the CDA as stock cooperatives, the report noted.

These RECs remained under the technical supervision of NEA , and functioned as electric cooperatives using accounting charts of the power industry. *Vincent Cabreza, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

Village chief, brother slain

MIDSAYAP, North Cotabato—A village chair and his brother were killed when ambushed by still unidentified men last week.

Barangay Rangaban chair Pendatun Palacad, 36, and his elder brother Sambutol, were heading for home from the Christmas party of the Army's 38th Infantry Battalion on board a motorcycle when waylaid by an armed group at 2 p.m.

The Army conducted pursuit operations but failed to make any arrests.

Soldiers recovered bullet shells from Garand rifles and US Thompson automatic rifles.

Midsayap Mayor Romeo Arania said the elder Palacad, Sambutol, died on the spot while the village chair managed to run for a few meters but later died due to multiple bullet wounds.

Arania appealed to relatives of the slain village official to stay calm and let the law take its course.

Palacad is reported to have relatives in the rebel movement. *Edwin O. Fernandez and Charlie C. Señase, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

Group urges probe of bomb try in Mindoro office

LUCENA CITY—A militant fishermen's group urged Congress to investigate the alleged bomb try on the local office of the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) in San Jose, Occidental Mindoro as it also assailed the military's "admission" that leftist organizations have been subject to "military operations."

Gerry Albert-Corpuz, spokesperson of the Pambansang Lakas ng Kilusang Mamamalakaya ng Pilipinas, a staunch ally of KMP, pressed legislators to look into the incident as it held the Macapagal administration and the Armed Forces of the Philippines culprits behind the bomb plot.

On Dec. 11, members of the KMP chapter in Occidental Mindoro found a hand grenade, with its spin pulled out, hanging outside the organization office in San Jose.

The bomb was safely diffused. Pamalakaya's affiliate chapter Alyansa ng mga Mangingisda sa Mindoro Occidental shares office with KMP in the province, Corpuz said.

"It was meant to rip off the office into pieces," he stressed.

AFP spokesperson Lt. Colonel Daniel Lucero, however, denied that the bomb-try was the work of the military and said the incident was part of the smear campaign against them.

Lucero also said that "soldiers are strictly honoring the Somo (suspension of military operations)" apparently referring to the government-declared ceasefire that started Dec. 10.

But Corpuz countered that Lucero's statement was an admission that the military operations, aside from targeting the communist New People's Army rebels, were also meant against militant groups tagged by the AFP as front organizations of the underground movement.

"Based on Lucero's statement, leaders and mass members of legal political groups like KMP and Pamalakaya are targets of military operations. Once the Somo lapses, the AFP will resume its all-out war against the NPA and above ground leaders and mass activists of legitimate and legal people's organizations," he said in a phone interview.

Corpuz described the incident as a "direct assault and first-rate crime against legitimate people's organizations in the name of state terror." *Delfin Mallari Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

Couple appeals for help for kid with heart ailment

PAMPLONA, Camarines Sur—Couple Efren and Leah Remullena of Barangay San Gabriel in this town would be the happiest persons this Christmas season should Good Samaritans hear their wish for their first and only child Ian Kenneth.

The child needs to undergo an operation for his congenital heart ailment.

In an interview with Ian's father Efren, 33, and mother Leah, 27, they said they discovered their baby boy's disease when he was eight months old.

Tests showed that the baby had a congenital heart disease.

"That time, he was still weighing 11 kilograms. Now that he's already a year and six months old, he only weighs 9 kilograms."

According to them, attending pediatrician Dr. Revenette Hernandez of the Philippine Heart Center in Quezon City told them that the patient should be operated on very soon or even his mental health would be affected.

Efren is a public school teacher in this town while Leah is jobless.

Since they discovered Ian's disease, they have been financially drained, especially because of their going to and from Manila for the child's regular medical checkup every three months.

"For his medication alone, we're spending about P3,000 to P4,000 every month," said Leah.

She said they need to raise at least P150,000 for Ian's operation.

The Remullenas are appealing to kind-hearted persons for help.

The family may be contacted through the INQUIRER Southern Luzon Bureau in Legazpi City at (052)8208402. *Michael Jaucian, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

Mysterious Philpost diggings linked to postal execs

BAGUIO CITY—Investigators of two mysterious tunnels beneath the old Baguio post office building have implicated four mailmen and a former Cordillera director of the Philippine Postal Corp. (Philpost) for the illegal diggings.

Philpost lawyer Mariano Perez confirmed the findings, after he sued several of the suspects for attempted homicide last week following a knife attack inside the Philpost compound.

Mailmen Joseph Castijon, Felimon Payadkeo and Tito Boyonen allegedly confronted Perez and another official on Dec. 5 for allowing a TV news crew to take footage of the tunnels. In their Dec. 9 complaint, Perez said the three chased them with knives.

The Philpost Inspection Service released its findings in October after a seven-month investigation but disclosed its contents to the Philpost Cordillera office only this week, Perez said.

The investigation report cites Gerardo Viterbo, former Philpost director, for his apparent tolerance of the illegal diggings. Viterbo was reassigned to the Philpost adjudication board early this year.

Viterbo's successor, Antonio Reyes, had blamed the former director for conspiring to operate an illegal treasure hunting activity under the post office building.

But last week, Postmaster General Diomedio Villanueva went to Baguio to replace Reyes, the whistle-blower, upon his request.

The two tunnels are approximately 27 meters deep, and both branch out toward sections of the city where banks are located, including the Philippine Postal Bank.

The investigators took note of a security blotter file that records the four mailmen's presence at the excavation site at nights since October 2002. The diggings were supposedly sanctioned by Viterbo and were meant as sewage tunnels.

Castijon was also identified among the postal workers who may be taken to task for the tunnels.

Perez said he was helping coordinate the Dec. 5 activities of the research crew of a TV news program who wanted to trace the tunnels' direction after the INQUIRER ran the report last month.

Hours later, Perez said he and Philpost custodian Roland Cosalan were allegedly approached by Castijon, Payadkeo and Boyonen, who complained that Philpost's disclosure about the tunnels had indicted them.

Payadkeo, however, denied being involved in the altercation. He said he was trying to break up the fight. "I don't know why I was accused of attacking (Perez). I was also unjustly accused of orchestrating the tunnel excavations, but I never even knew there was one. I was investigated but nothing turned up from that investigation," he said. *Vincent Cabreza, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Norway to finance survey to determine environment effects of aquaculture

DAGUPAN CITY—The Norwegian Embassy and the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources will make an environmental survey of aquaculture areas in the country, and will adopt models for the prediction of environmental impacts of fish cages and pens.

Westly Rosario, chief of the BFAR research center here, said the Norwegian Embassy would finance the project, which would be implemented in Bolinao and Anda towns, both in Pangasinan, La Union and Taal Lake in Batangas.

The project involves a detailed survey of production in these areas, bathymetry (depth of water), temperature, salinity and oxygen profile, sediment analysis, current speed and direction, tidal range, wind direction, frequency and speed.

Rosario said the project was proposed because of the increasing problems with fish kills in marine cages and freshwater pen culture.

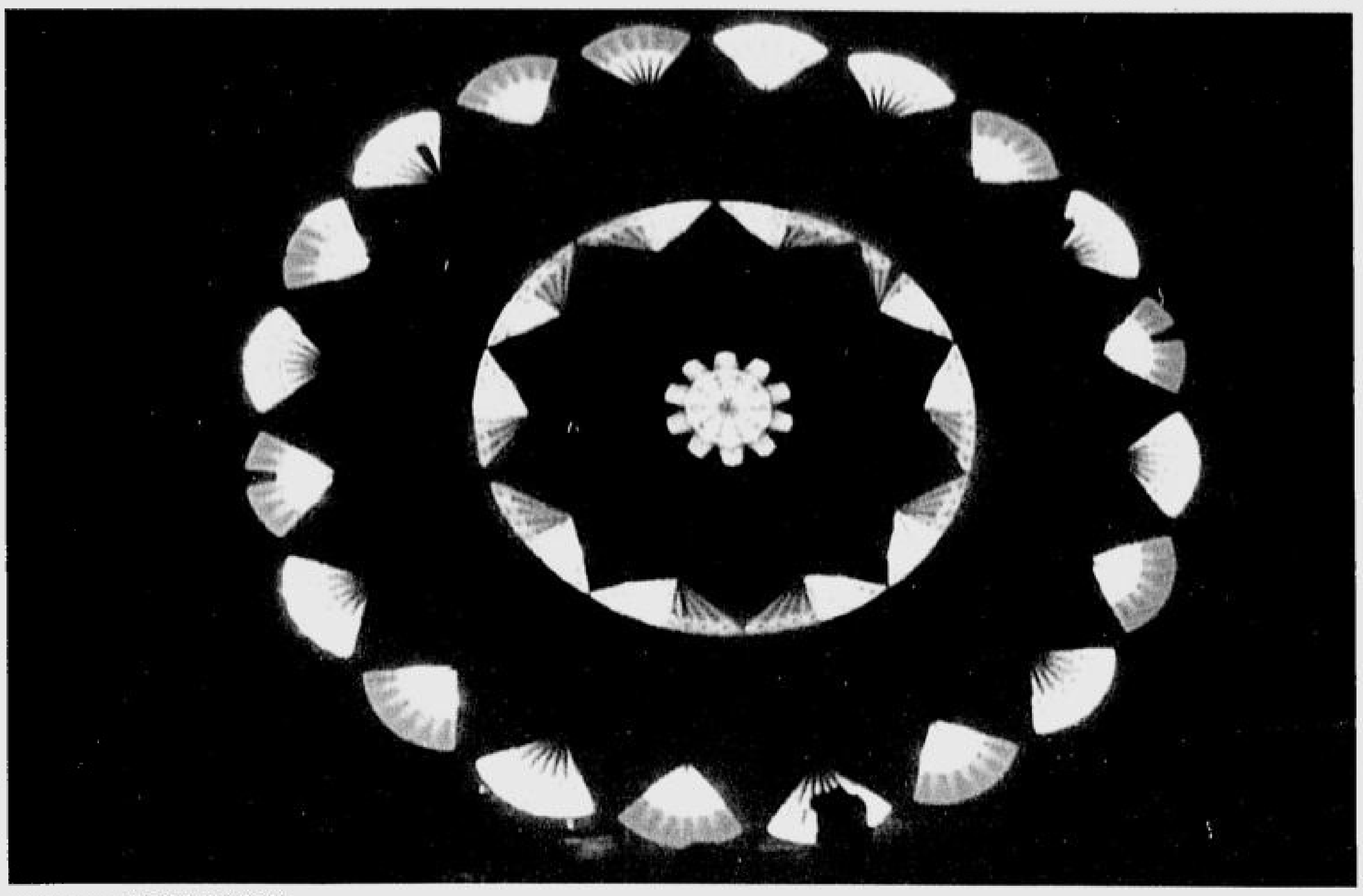
Currently, even BFAR does not know the total carrying capacity of the bodies of water in the country, and that "it was a hit-and-miss" thing on how much fish can survive in a given area, Rosario said.

In February 2002, fish kills hit bangus (milkfish) production in Bolinao, with the loss estimated at P600 million. Fish kills had also occurred in Dagupan City, Anda and Binmaley towns, all in Pangasinan. The province supplies 40 percent of the milkfish requirement of Metro Manila.

The fish kills could have been due to overproduction, overstocking of the pens, toxic algae tide or algal bloom, poor feed management and restriction of water flow by the pens, Rosario said.

He said the other major risk area is the Taal Lake, which produces 20 percent of the country's tilapia production.

Taal Lake also suffers from regular fish kills due to low oxygen levels in certain parts of the lake, he said. *Yolanda Sotelo-Fuertes, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*



STAR OF THE SEASON

TONETTF OREJAS/PDI CENTRAL LUZON DESK

The *parol* or Christmas lantern is easily the star of the holidays as places nationwide display the unique Filipino decoration like in the City of San Fernando where stars as huge as this one, measuring 18 feet in diameter, are hung out for display.

Bad start for polls in C. Luzon

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—The May 2004 election period began on a bad note in Central Luzon.

Commission on Elections offices in the region's 122 towns and cities did not receive copies of certificates of candidacy (COC) on Monday, the start of the filing of candidacies.

Comelec personnel at the Central Luzon office here confirmed they only got one copy of COC via fax from the commission's national office.

"No COC has been distributed yet in the provinces," a staffer said.

Anticipating the requests of candidates and political parties for copies of the COCs, several local election officers reported they borrowed the copy from the regional office and had this reproduced.

They said they did so because they did not want to earn the ire of politicians who are angry or are surprised when they are asked to pay for the cost of reproducing the COC.

COC is a one-page document. At least five copies of the accomplished form are submitted during the filing at the municipal and provincial levels. The political party's certificate of nomination is attached to the form.

In Pampanga, only one candidate filed his candidacy on Monday. He was Board Member Ferdinand Labung of Buklod Kapampangan. He is seeking a seat in Congress for the province's third district. *Tonette Orejas, PDI Central Luzon Desk*

PLAN VS HIGHWAY ROBBERIES

'Color-coding' adopted vs hijackings

CAMP VICENTE LIM, Laguna—The Calabarzon police office said it has had enough of reported highway robberies and hijackings that have pestered several business enterprises and trucking services in the region.

And to bring the problem to an end, police have resorted to using the scheme that was thought to reduce the traffic problem in Metro Manila—the color-coding system.

Senior Supt. Perfecto Palad, Calabarzon police director for operations, said they met with members of the Confederation of Truckers Association of the Philippines (CTAP) and signed a memorandum of agreement on the issuance of color-coded stickers and pass cards to trucks and other delivery vehicles taking the major thoroughfares of the region.

Palad said CTAP members welcomed the initiative, which they hope would finally stop robbery syndicates.

He said they would put up several checkpoints in vital areas where trucks passing the region would undergo "strict checking."

He said police officers would be assigned to man these checkpoints to ensure the smooth implementation of the project.

"It was agreed that the pass cards and stickers would be initially issued and filled out by CTAP members. These cards and stickers would indicate the origin, point of entry and destination of the vehicle. It would also show what major roads the vehicle should take," Palad said.

He said the Cavite police has already started issuing pass cards to trucking companies using the province as entry and exit points to other provinces in Southern Luzon.

Laguna and Batangas have likewise implemented a one-way pass card plan.

For years, hijacking of delivery trucks in the region caused severe financial problems to businessmen. Just last month, Nestlé Philippines lost P2 million worth of products to highway robbers.

Director Enrique Galang, chief of the directorial staff of the Philippine National Police, said every truck entering the Calabarzon area would be given three colored stickers.

Galang, who visited this camp over the weekend, said a sticker in the left side of the vehicle would indicate where the truck had came from. A sticker in its right side denotes the vehicle's destination while another sticker in the middle shows the route of the truck. *Marlon Ramos, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

Bid for refuge of accused in Javier slay revived

By Nestor P. Burgos Jr.
PDI Visayas Bureau

ILOILO CITY—A Canadian court has ordered the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) of Canada to review its earlier ruling denying the application for refugee status of an accused in the murder of former Antique Gov. Evelio Javier.

In an 87-point order dated Dec. 12 and posted on its website, the Federal Court of Canada granted the application for judicial review of Rodolfo "Ding" Pacificador.

The federal court said the IRB erroneously dismissed Pacificador's claim of fear of persecution for political motives in the Philippines despite the board's recognition that the judicial system in the Philippines was "corrupt, unfair and marked by torture and police brutality..."

The court called as "perverse" the IRB's view that Pacificador would not likely face persecution because there was evidence to show that rich and influential persons in the Philippines could "manipulate the corrupt judicial system to their benefit."

The IRB denied Pacificador's application in August last year for failing to prove "well-founded fears of persecution" in his country, which is the basis for granting refugee status to applicants.

The board, according to the court order, had noted that Pacificador's father, former assemblyman Arturo Pacificador, "had never been tortured or beaten while (in) detention and that there was no evidence to show that (he) had been intentionally worn down by harsh prison conditions."

The elder Pacificador, tagged as the mastermind in Javier's murder, is detained at the Antique provincial jail with 11 of his co-accused.

But the federal court said the IRB erred by considering only the situation of Pacificador's father and not "his membership in a group consisting of persons in the Philippines who are prosecuted for political motives and whose prosecution appears to be tainted by corruption."

The federal court also said the IRB should have included in its deliberation the decision of the Ontario Court of Appeals, which reversed an order of a lower court to extradite Pacificador to the Philippines.

The board had refused to include the results of the extradition case in the application for refugee status, saying the two cases were different.

The younger Pacificador fled to Canada in October 1987 and requested refugee status. Even if his refugee application is denied, he cannot be sent back to the Philippines to face trial for Javier's murder.

Canadian courts denied the Philippine government's request to extradite Pacificador to the Philippines to stand trial.

The courts believed that sending him back to the Philippines would violate Pacificador's constitutional rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms because he faced persecution and serious threats to his life if he was extradited.

Prosecution witnesses had testified that the younger Pacificador was present in the planning of Javier's murder. They alleged that he met with the gunmen before and after the killing.

Group lists 506 rights abuse cases

DAVAO CITY—Human rights group Karapatan said it has recorded 506 cases of human rights violations in Southern Mindanao from January to December this year.

The group claimed that heavy military presence in the region triggered the increase in the number of human rights violations.

Karapatan said the top violations were illegal search with 121 cases, harassment with 68 cases, divestment of properties with 50 cases, killings with 46 cases and indiscriminate firing with 34 cases.

Ariel Casilao, Karapatan secretary general, said that based on the number of cases this year, at least 49 individuals became victims of human rights violations perpetrated by state "security forces" and agents.

"The victims are mostly poor peasants, lumad and Moro peoples, women, including children. *Edwin O. Fernandez and Ryan D. Rosauro, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

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Economic planning chief says tourism head 'upset with me'

BAGUIO CITY—Tourism Secretary Richard Gordon has shifted his ire from rival Feliciano Payumo, chair of the Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA), to the government's chief economist, who approved an expensive Subic port project that will be financed by Japan.

Secretary Romulo Neri, director general of the National Economic and Development Authority, said he had approved the $215-million Subic port development project at Cubi Point, and the $600-million expressway linking Subic and the Clark Special Economic Zone.

Gordon had objected to the SBMA port program because of "a risky" $157-million loan that the government will need to tap from the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC). He also claimed that corruption attended SBMA's processing of the Subic port project.

"Gordon is very upset with me. He feels I have already sold out to Payumo. But of course I told Gordon he should know me better than that," Neri said.

"The Gordons are family friends. He's close to my sister and my brother-in-law. In fact, when they go to the United States, they stay in my sister's house."

But Neri said Malacañang had decided to accept the unusually exorbitant cost of raising the port because the facility ensured a P1-billion growth for Central Luzon.

"Nothing personal, nothing political. I am just looking at the economic bottom line, and that project, although it is expensive ... was approved by Neda in the past," he said.

He said the port project is of vital national interest, despite its high cost. The port will cost twice the normal expenditures for a similar facility, but the Japanese facilities are usually of excellent quality, he said.

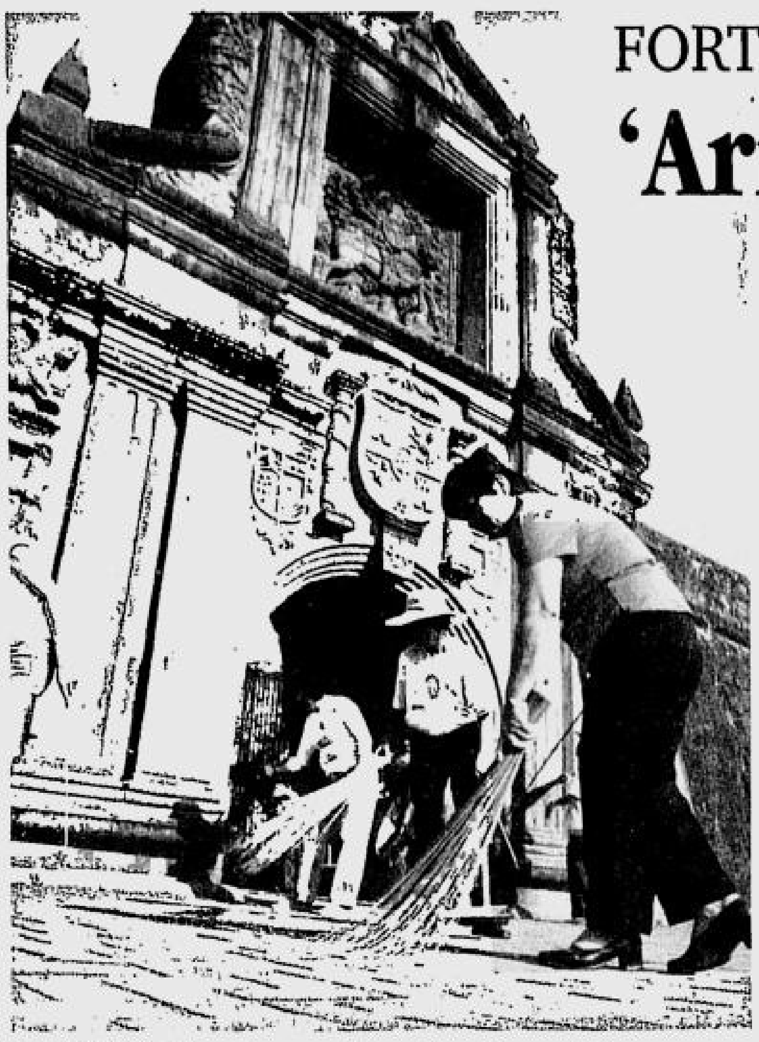
"Once you put a port and a road system, Central Luzon will boom. I predict that, with the project, Central Luzon can have a 5 to 10 percent additional growth (in its Gross Domestic Product). Now Central Luzon's GDP is about P500-P600 billion. A 10-percent GDP growth on a per annum basis is about $1 billion," he said.

Gordon said a port at Cubi Point would endanger marine life in the area. He said the former United States Navy Supply Depot (NSD) in Subic Bay had been identified by the World Bank as "an ideal site" for handling container cargo.

Payumo said the existing Subic Freeport only handles 600,000 to 900,000 TEUs (twenty equivalent units of 20-foot containers) a year. About 1,377 cargo ships pass through Subic each year.

He said the proposed new Subic port could handle 300,000 TEUs.

In a press statement, the League of Cities of the Philippines has sided with Gordon, through a resolution that it adopted during its 43rd general assembly in Manila. The resolution pointed out that the project would place the government under unnecessary risk for taking out a JBIC loan, without any clear recourse for its payments. *Vincent Cabreza, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*



VOLUNTEERS from Olongapo City and employees of the Department of Tourism get to storm the historic stronghold in Manila and pick it clean of dirt and unsightly clutter. ERIK ARAZAS

FORT SANTIAGO

‘Army’ sweeps old Manila fortress

By Tarra Quismundo

AN . ARMY yesterday took over Fort Santiago once again.

But the troops were armed not with firearms, but with brooms, dustpans and garbage bags.

Around 200 employees of the Department of Tourism, the Intramuros administration and volunteers from Olongapo City, yesterday morning took part in the massive cleanup of the old stronghold.

The volunteers came at 8:45 a.m., and helped out the 14-man cleanup crew that maintains Fort Santiago.

The volunteers swept the leaves and removed the grains of dust that clung to the centuries-old walls.

There was no retreat for the army that picked clean the grounds of Plaza Moriones at the entrance, the gate facing the moat, and the Plaza Armas near the Rizal Shrine.

And what of the trash they collected? The troops placed them in garbage bags and took them to the waiting trucks they brought along for the day's mission.

“This is not the first time that DOT employees had a cleanup drive,” said Teresita Alvaro, officer-in-charge of DOT's personnel division. “Before Roxas Boulevard had the Baywalk, we went there to clean up the garbage (near the breakwater).”

The ruins of the former American barracks, situated at the right side of Plaza Moriones, was cleared of the antique items and carriage that were stored in the structure.

“(The ruins) will be restored, and the items removed there will be put in a warehouse,” said Armand Arreza, DOT undersecretary for Internal Services.

“The front lawn will be landscaped, and we will put up lights that will be directed at the barracks,” added Arreza, who organized yesterday's cleanup drive.

DOT Sec. Richard Gordon, who came to check on the cleanup drive yesterday, said that a museum walled with glass would be built in the two-story American barracks.

Arreza said that the cleanup was part of the preparation for a full makeover of Fort Santiago—first built as a wooden fort in the 18th century by Rajah Sulayman, the last of the Tagalog leaders before the Spanish conquest.

“Almost every corner of this place has a story,” Arreza said.

“This is hallowed ground and we don't want to destroy that. This place will soon be a mellowed down park, where people can sit on the benches, listen to classical music and relax.”

Mother Nature getting back at us

ON TARGET

Ramon Tulfo

WHEN we fool around with Mother Nature by indiscriminately cutting down trees in the forest, throwing wastes into canals and rivers, polluting the air with smoke from motor vehicles and factories, we should be ready to reap the consequences.

And what are the consequences? Respiratory diseases, floods and landslides. The people of Southern Leyte are paying for the deforestation of their mountains. So did the people of Ormoc City in 1991.

But we still don't learn the bitter lesson of Mother Nature getting back at them for raping her, in the form of killer floods and landslides and deadly respiratory diseases.

* * *

You reap what you sow, so the old saying goes.

Since Filipinos don't respect Mother Nature, they should not expect her to take care of them.

That's the law of karma.

* * *

When you look at our rivers and esteros, you'll know how undisciplined and filthy Filipinos are. Plastic wrappers, empty cans and bottles and other kinds of discarded matters are thrown into the river.

The word “baboy” (pig) is used by Pinoys to mean a person who wallows in filth.

But one wonders who's more “baboy”: us or the pig. A pig, when taught proper hygiene, is a very clean animal. A lot of American homes make pigs their pets.

* * *

When I was a kid living in my mother's hometown in Manay, Davao Oriental, our source of drinking water was the river near my grandmother's home. The river was also the source of fish and *kuyog* (shells) that served as food on our table. Now you can't even bathe in Manay river without risking contracting a skin disease.

People living upstream have made the river their toilet and garbage dump.

What happened to Manay river is replicated in other parts of the country.

* * *

In Metro Manila, floods take place during heavy rains because of clogged drainage.

What clogged the drainage system? Plastic wrappers, empty bottles and cans thrown into the esteros and rivers.

We will have less flooding in Metro Manila if only the squatters living on the banks of the esteros and rivers are no longer “baboy.”

* * *

We already have the Clean Air Law, but it seems to be a dead letter law. The authorities are not enforcing the law.

Just cruise along Epifanio de los Santos Ave. (Edsa) and you'll see buses, cabs, vans and private vehicles spewing black smoke.

Nobody seems to care whether the Clean Air Law is being enforced or not.

* * *

Filipinos who go to Saudi Arabia to work as domestic help should be prepared for the worst nightmare of their lives. Yes, the pay is high, but is it worth the nightmare?

Glendalyn Amazona, a maid in the palace of Madawi Khalid Bin Turki al-Saud, is being maltreated by one of its occupants, a princess. She says the princess beats her up and drags her down the stairs by the hair.

Amazona has sought the help of the outside world—her relatives and the consulate general of Jeddah—to get her out of the hellhole, to no avail.

Why? Because the officials and employees at the Jeddah consulate are Muslim. A Muslim usually sides with a fellow Muslim in a controversy involving a non-Muslim.

METROBRIEFS

Bonus pay recovered

FACTORY workers in Marikina City yesterday heaved a sigh of relief after police recovered their holiday bonus of P165,000 from three robbers who stormed their office. Bobby Turon, 29, Wilfrede Denoy, 46, and Allan Nailon, 33, were arrested for robbing the Big Tree International Inc. in Marikina Heights, said Senior Supt. Felipe Rojas Jr. The police also took in two security guards—Ramices Valdes and Valdemar Fernando. The suspects claimed that the guards had provided them with a sketch of the company premises, Rojas said. *Luige del Puerto*

Suspected thief slain

JOHNNY Benito Jr., 18, was killed in an alleged encounter with lawmen Sunday morning in Quezon City. Benito's brother, Rocky, 21, was arrested, police said. The Benito brothers, of Montalban, Rizal, reportedly robbed tricycle driver Antolin Cajandab, 27, at 10:45 p.m. inside the Villa Gracia Subdivision. Responding lawmen caught the suspects and engaged them in a shootout. *Tiña Santos*

Guard stabbed

SECURITY guard Rene Ellanora yesterday tried to stop a drunken man from roaming the building he was guarding. Ellanora, 36, wound up with a knife wound in his chest. The suspect, identified only as “Jo,” attacked the guard at about 10 p.m. Sunday, inside the NNHS Builders Compound in Malabon City, police said. *Edson Tandoc Jr.*

Cab robbers nabbed

MIKE dela Cruz, 22, yesterday was wounded when he tried to resist arresting officers in Caloocan, police said. His cohort, a 17-year-old boy, was also taken in. The two allegedly robbed taxi driver Arnulfo Apuya on 8th Avenue at about 12:30 a.m. Three lawmen responded to the alarm and caught the suspects. *Edson Tandoc Jr.*

Teener caught with ‘toy’ that kills

POLICE on Sunday arrested a 16-year-old boy who was carrying a toy gun that had been converted into a real .22-caliber firearm.

Police said the firearm, whose barrel had been fitted with a mechanism that could allow it to fire a real bullet, could hurt or even kill a person.

P03 Renato Garay said the boy was on his way to a rumble with a group of friends when he was spotted by Domingo Olmognes, a barangay watchman, at the corner of J. Bocobo and Nakpil Streets in Malate, Manila, at around 2:30 a.m.

Garay said that Olmognes became suspicious of the boy and his friends and sought the assistance of two policemen from the Sta. Monica precinct.

The boys scampered in different directions when the lawmen approached them.

The policemen gave chase and caught the 16-year-old carrying the converted firearm. *Leila Salaverria*

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METRO

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Editor Abelardo S. Ulanday

Maynilad to play Santa to Las Piñas, Cavite folk

By Tina Santos and Margaux Ortiz

THIS gift will not come in a box.

The Maynilad Water Services Inc. yesterday said that its "present" for its customers affected by an unscheduled water interruption in southern Metro Manila will arrive in time for Christmas.

Rodrigo Yabut, Maynilad water production head, assured residents of Parañaque City, Las Piñas City, Bacoor and Imus that they would have water on Dec. 25.

Yabut said Maynilad repair crews were working round-the-clock to fix a 1,100 mm-diameter mainline that was punctured during digging operations at the corner of Naia and Coastal Roads in Parañaque.

"We have started welding the patch on the damaged portion of the pipeline," he said.

The Maynilad official added, "We expect to finish repair work and 100 percent energization of the line by tomorrow morning."

A section of the mainline was dented and torn early Sunday morning during a pile-driving activity for the construction of a footbridge across the Naia and Coastal Roads.

The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA), which is in charge of the project, blamed the Maynilad for not providing accurate information regarding the location of the water pipe.

However, MMDA deputy chair Danny Lacuna said that their contractor, Freysinnet, would still be held liable for the accident.

Meanwhile, Lacuna stressed that the footbridge project was not entirely the reason for the heavy traffic in the area.

"We believe that the traffic jams are really caused by the holiday rush," he said.

In the meantime, Maynilad deployed water tankers to the affected areas to provide relief while repair work continues.

The water concessionaire advised its clients to dial 1626 for the schedule of water deliveries.

Fire victim has a simple wish this Christmas

By Edson Tandoc Jr.

FISHERMAN Gally Galtala will not be thinking of Noche Buena this Christmas Eve, but he will be making a simple wish: A pair of rubber boots so that he could go back to work.

His old pair of boots, along with his house and all of his belongings, had gone up in flames when a fire hit their neighborhood in North Bay Boulevard South in Navotas Sunday.

All he had left were the shirt on his back and the pants he was wearing when the fire broke out at 3 p.m.

The INQUIRER chanced upon Galtala at the North Bay Boulevard Elementary School yesterday.

He stared blankly at his fellow fire victims: children hungry and crying; fathers snatching a few hours of sleep; and mothers impatiently waiting for food from the social workers.

The small school, which was turned into an evacuation center for more than 500 affected families, looked and sounded like a market, with clothes and pieces of appliances saved from the fire scattered all over the place.

Those wishing to help the victims may call the local welfare office at (02) 282-6232.

A 6-month-old baby boy was killed and more than 200 houses were burned in that blaze, which was only one of three that hit northern Metro Manila in 10 hours.

Galtala said the fire started at the first floor of a two-story shanty at the back of his house.

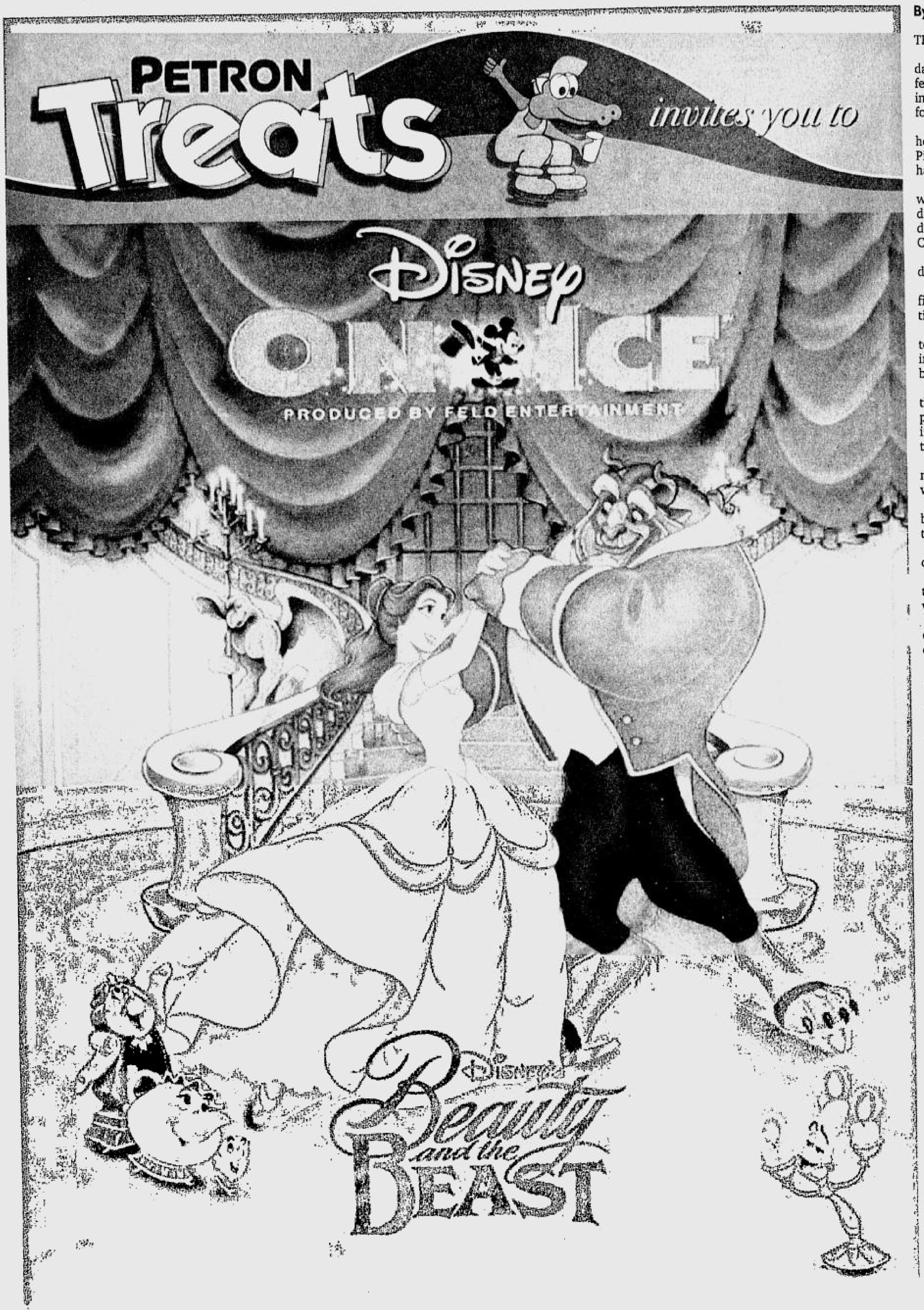
It was reportedly ignited by an unattended candle and was spread by strong winds coming from Manila Bay.

At almost the same time on Sunday, another residential area on Banana Street, Sta. Quiteria, Caloocan City, was hit by fire. Fifteen houses were razed and an estimated P2 million in property was lost.

At about 12:30 a.m. yesterday, fire destroyed a plastic wares and furniture warehouse in Malanday, Valenzuela.

It started at the back portion of the Jackton Enterprises warehouse in Santiago Street, said city fire investigation chief Arnel Ibasco.

About P5 million in property was destroyed in the incident.



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SPORTS

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New format for Fiesta Conference

By June Navarro

THIS time the top teams in the eliminations will get their just due.

Automatic berths in the second round will now be given as incentive to the top two teams after the eliminations of the transition tournament of the Philippine Basketball Association set February to May next year.

The four-month tourney will serve as appetizer to the opening of the revised 2004 season beginning in October.

Responding to criticisms that the conference format last year did not reward excellence, commissioner Noli Eala yesterday said the transition tournament will be leaders-friendly this time.

After going through a double-round elimination, the top two teams at the end of their 18-game assignments advance outright to the quarterfinals.

While the No. 3 and No. 4 teams join the six other squads in a knockout phase known as the sudden-death eliminations, they will be enjoying twice-to-beat incentives.

The pairings call for Team No. 3 to meet the tailender in the 10-squad tournament. Team No. 4 faces No. 9, team No. 5 tackles No. 8 and No. 6 squares off with the seventh-seeded squad.

"This will push teams to really go for a good record. If you don't get to the top four, you have no incentive. If you are No. 5 and below, it's one loss and you're out," said Eala.

The surviving six teams will then be divided into two divisions of three squads that will have a foreign team each to spice up the competition in the conference known as the PBA Fiesta Conference.

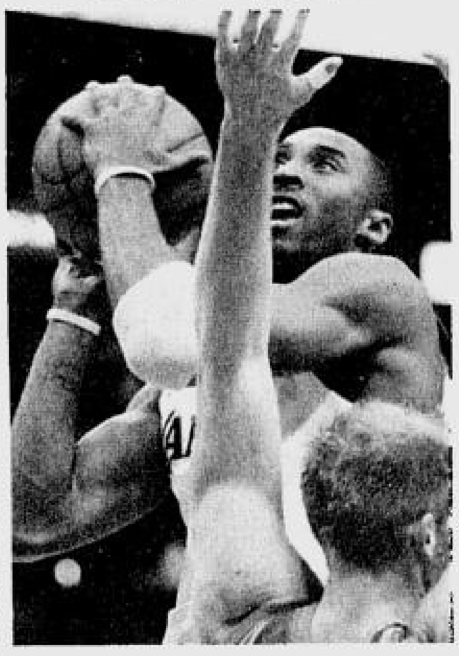
"We will go to extreme measures to make sure that the foreign teams we will invite won't be like the ones that came before. We will make sure that the foreign teams will really give our local squads a tough challenge," said Eala.

The qualifiers strut their wares in a single-round quarterfinal phase with the top four teams advancing to the semifinals, which will be a best-of-three crossover affair. The surviving teams will mix it up in a best-of-five championship series.

In the previous conferences, elimination-round leaders lose their won-game advantage in the next round as all teams start from scratch.

EALA: Extreme measures

WHAT'S INSIDE



■ McGrady spins one for Magic /A21

■ Sunkist Tigers shade Welcoat; Viva-FEU wins /A20

PBA's new TV partner known today

THE PHILIPPINE Basketball Association has postponed for today its decision on a new television partner, citing the need to evaluate the proposals thoroughly.

Chair Jun Cabalan yesterday said the governors are gathering more information on interested parties and would declare the new coveror after another board meeting today at the PBA offices.

"We need more information with respect to the proposals, so the board thought it would be better if we decide on the matter tomorrow (today)," said Cabalan.

ABC-5, Jemah Television and Studio 23 have signified intention to take over the coverage of the games after the the league's contract with the NBN-IBC consortium, this year's official television carrier, has been rescinded for failing to meet the league's expectations.

The NBN-IBC consortium owes the league P134 million following its failure to come up with the P200 million it must pay the PBA for the first of its three-year pact as exclusive broadcaster of the games.

NBN-4 and IBC-13 have parted ways and made separate proposals on how to cover the losses of the PBA for next season. IBC-13 also owes the league P60 million as penalty for its failure to telecast the last 20 games of the PBA this year.

PBA Commissioner Noli Eala was scheduled to meet some of the interested coverors at presstime, even as a reliable source said ABC-5, owned by Tonyboy Cojuangco, has the edge in the race to secure the TV franchise.

June Navarro

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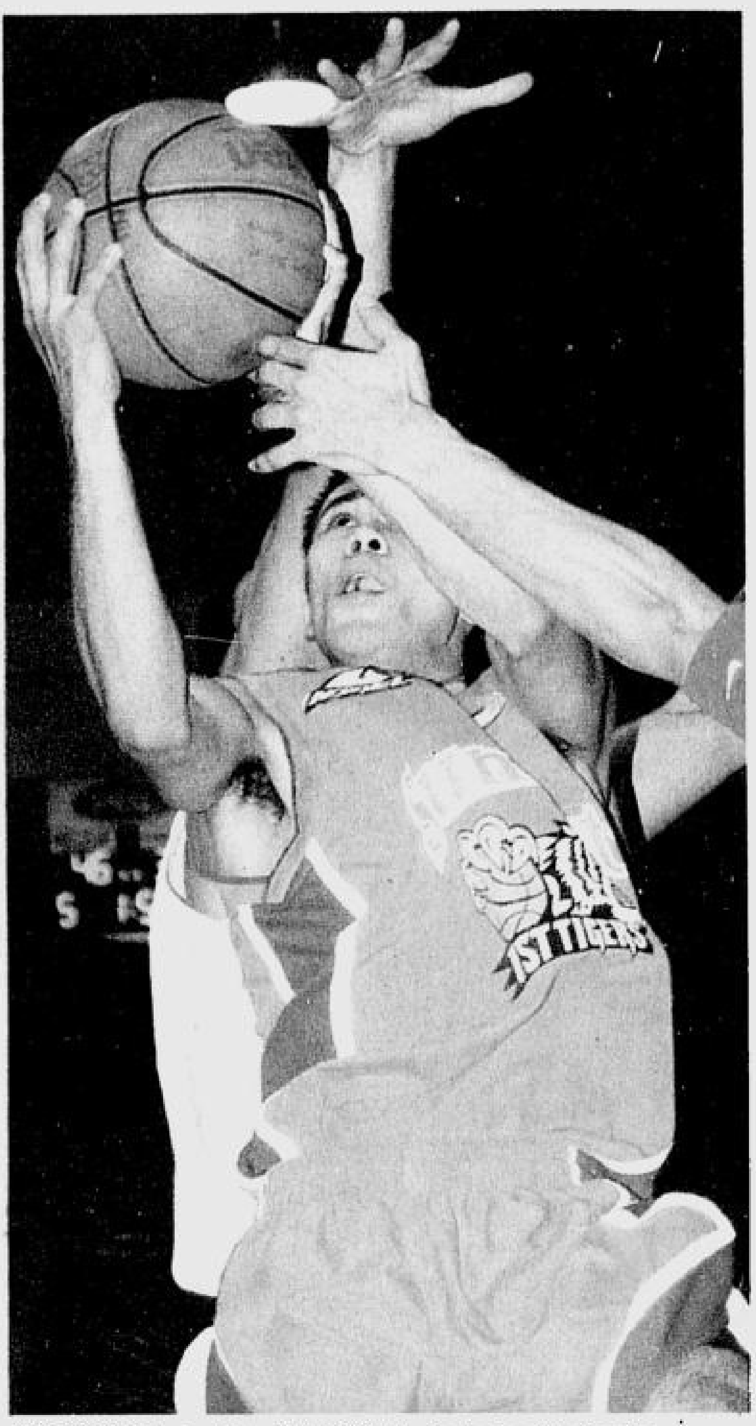
Sunkist Tigers shade Welcoat; Viva-FEU wins



EMERSON Oreta of Sunkist-UST attacks the basket despite Welcoat's tough defense in the game last night. AUGUST DELA CRUZ

By Marc Anthony Reyes

JEMAL Vizcarra buried back-to-back three-pointers in the final minute as Sunkist-UST downed league-leader Welcoat, 89-83, last night to capture the second semifinal berth in the PBL Platinum Cup at the Pasig Sports Center.

The 6-foot-1 Vizcarra, the Tigers' designated shooter even in the UAAP, grabbed the lead from the Paint Masters, 84-83, with still 50 seconds left in the game.

After a Welcoat turnover, Vizcarra, 20, launched his second triple in front of 6-foot-6 Ervin Sotto from the corner with 17.8 seconds left as the Tigers clinched their seventh win—and their fourth straight—in 12 games.

Dondon Villamin finished the scoring with two freethrows to wind up with 17 markers behind the 25 of Vizcarra.

The Paint Masters, the first semifinalist, scored only two points in the last three minutes and succumbed to their second defeat in 10 starts.

Early in the day, Arwind Santos and Dennis Miranda provided the fourth-quarter fire as Viva Mineral Water-FEU posted a come-from-behind 79-73 victory over Montaña Jewel, 79-73, and remained in semifinal contention.

The FEU stalwarts in the UAAP scored seven points apiece in the final period as the Tamaraws rallied from 14 points behind in scoring their second straight victory for a 3-6 card.

Viva must sweep all its three games to make it to the next round but coach Koy Banal was just too happy to hack out a victory before the league takes a holiday break.

"I told them that we won't have kris kringle anymore, but let's give each other a gift," said Banal, referring to the cohesiveness that helped the Tams earn the victory. "It is the unity we have shown out there that won for us the game."

GAMES JAN. 3
(Pasig Sports Center)
2 p.m.—Viva vs BluStar
4 p.m.—Fash vs Montana

The Tamaraws, the UAAP and the Champions League winners this year, succeeded in muzzling Montaña top guns Gary David and Ronjay Enrile.

Pointguard Warren Ybanez also created a lot of scoring opportunities for the Tamaraws, who slapped a third straight loss on the Paint Masters, now with a 4-5 record.

Former pro Sunny Margate chipped in 10 points, while RJ Rizada finally moved out of the shadows of his more popular teammates by nailing five of his 11 points in the fourth.

Scores:

First Game

VIVA 79—Miranda 15, Santos 11, Rizada 11, Margate 10, Jones 9, Isip 8, Co 6, Ybanez 5, Sinco 2, Razon 1, Napa 1.

MONTAÑA 73—Magpayo 19, David 15, Alfad 15, Salvador 10, Manigo 7, Coronel 5, Guerrero 2, Basco 0, Magsumbol 0, Capati 0, Enrile 0, Mendoza 0.

Quarters: 16-17, 31-47, 50-57, 79-73

Second Game

SUNKIST 89—Vizcarra 25, Villamin 17, Espiritu 10, Oreta 10, Compton 9, Mendoza 8, De Guzman 7, Santos 2, Franco 1, Luanzon 0.

WELCOAT 83— Tangkay 22, Wilson 18, Sotto 16, Pingris 14, Omolon 4, Cuan 4, Artadi 3, Patrimonio 2, Reyes 0, Yap 0.

Quarters: 18-35, 39-46, 63-67, 89-83.

Carandang, Team Carrera rule Globe Cycling Tour

THE GLOBE peloton negotiates a hill in Jala-jala, Rizal.

ERIC Carandang and his Team Carrera Look Alabang squad dominated the three-day First Globe Telecom Cycling Tour organized by World Cycling Adventures recently.

Carandang, a brand manager of Philip Morris Inc., won the yellow jersey as overall winner while Team Carrera Look Alabang bagged the overall team prize after five of its riders completed the three stages with the fastest accumulated times.

Team Carrera Look Alabang, with Carandang as spearhead, prevailed in the team time trial serving as first lap. The race was held on a 40-km course set on the rolling hills of Jala-jala, Rizal, with the teams being flagged off in three-minute intervals.

Carandang topped the 85-km massed start race that included an 8-km climb in Mabitac, Rizal the next day, and repeated his leading performance in the 12-km individual time trial capped by an uphill 8-km ascent to the finish in Bugarin, Rizal in the third and last lap.

The multistage bike race, organized exclusively for "club riders," including businessmen, executives and entrepreneurs who took up competitive cycling part-time, attracted nine teams from Metro Manila and Bicol.

Each team had five riders and an alternate.

SPORTSWATCH

DOUBLE TREAT Pacific Internet's Duckee Timario (right) and Fritzy Fernandez in action in ladies doubles during the recent Pioneer Badminton Christmas tournament in Mandaluyong City. Team Aqua Blue captured the overall title over three other teams.

Harry's Up hands Claret 1st loss

HARRY'S UP 1 dealt Claret School its first loss, 66-59, in the 13 and under division of the SMC Holiday Hoop Challenge in the third day of elimination to lead the six-team Group A with a 3-0 win-loss card. A total of 24 teams are participating in this competition, an offshoot of the successful SMC Basketball Goodwill Circuit headed by Coach Eric Altamirano. In the 13-under Group B, La Salle's B squad beat Barangay Jesus De La Peña, 69-43. La Salle B now totes a 1-2 to keep its hope alive of earning a slot in the semis. The top two teams from each group will figure in a crossover semis that will determine the finalists of the competition supported by some of SMC's major brands like Magnolia poultry and dairy products, Purefoods, Purefoods-Hormel and Monterey's meat products as well as Cali, B-Meg, and products of Philippine Beverage Partners Inc. including Magnolia fruit juices, FunChum, and Viva. San Miguel's flour business will also support the event. The 16-under team of Harry's Up likewise maintained a 3-0 slate in Group A, upending New Era, 56-47, in yesterday's match. San Beda also sustained its winning run in the group with a 66-26 romp over Jose Rizal U. to post a 3-0 record. Veritas broke into the 16-under win column, with its 70-41 rout of Hoop It Up.

UB to host active chess tourney

THE ACTIVE Chess Center of Asia (ACCA), Belgosa Media Systems (BMS) and the Baguio Active Chess (BAC) join forces to stage an Active Chess tournament on Dec. 27-28 at the University of Baguio's Dapayan Hall in Baguio City. The ACCA is the organizer of the Philippine Executive Chess Express (PEACE), the world's longest running monthly tournament series for business executives and professionals. BMS is one of the leading educational publishers and distributors in the country. The newly formed BAC is headed by engineer Alfonso Rulloda. It can be recalled that the country's first Active Chess tournament was held in Baguio City in 1987. At stake in the two-day Baguio tournament is a cash prize of P10,000. The champion gets the lion share of P5,000. Trophies donated by Baguio City councilor Raffy Panagan will be awarded to the top four finishers. Entries are being accepted at the Mido Inn along Session Road in Baguio City. Entry fee is P200. For inquiries, call or text 0920-9034864.

Roligon's Pasko derby stakes P.3M

ROLIGON Mega Cockpit's "Pasko Na 4-Cock Derby" is set at 6 tonight with more than 100 fights lined up. Host Roming Vergara said the cash prize at stake is P300,000 while entry fee is P10,000. Entries must be submitted until noon today, and interested parties may contact 833-2275 and 833-1638 for details. Meanwhile, the "Noche Buena 5-Cock New Year Derby" sizzles this Saturday and Monday, Dec. 27 and 29. Promoter Rolly Ligon has put up a total prize of P750,000 for an entry fee of P5,500. A P50,000 bonus awaits the fastest kill champion. All handlers will receive a Christmas gift from Ligon like TV, DVD player, stereo VCD, gas stove, rice cooker, electric fan, flat iron and Noche Buena basket. Preparations are also under way for the "Roligon 14th Anniversary 7-Cock Derby" on Jan. 31, Feb. 3, 5, 7, 10 and 12, with P3.6 million at stake. Entry fee is P11,000.

JUDO MASTER: Prof. Tsuneo Sengoku (left), 8th Dan Kodokan and six-time All-Japan judo champion, is congratulated by Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay after conducting a two-week seminar for law enforcers and PAJA (Philippine Amateur Judo Association) members on judo and *taihujutsu*. Sengoku, now chief instructor of the Japan National Police Academy, came here on the invitation of PAJA president and Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency director Reynaldo H. Jaylo.

Johnny's Durable Dozen

SPECTATOR

Al S. Mendoza

FOR one month, Johnny Tam embarked on a mission only a handful knew about. Aided by his deputies Ching Ching Marcelino and Eric King, Johnny prepared 12 hardy souls for an overseas operation that would put the Philippine flag on the line.

So rigid was the regimen that Johnny gave his boys drills even on Sundays. So focused and determined were Johnny's boys that to call them Johnny's Durable Dozen would be an understatement.

When the time came, Johnny's Durable Dozen left without fanfare. No send-off parties. No nothing.

When the mission was done, albeit successfully, Johnny's Durable Dozen came home without fanfare. No streamers. No marching band. No confetti. No nothing.

They held high the huge championship trophy they had won the night before when they deplaned at the Naia on the cold, damp night of December 20. No cameras. No banners. No nothing.

Leaving quietly, arriving quietly. That was what Johnny's Durable Dozen did last week. The BAP's Graham Lim, their source of pride, could only nod approvingly.

Oh, "incidentally," they did one more thing: Win the 6th International Zhen Chenggong Cup in Nanan, a booming city not far from Xiamen in the giant China Province of Fujian. Zhen Chenggong, a native son of Nanan, was the legendary Chinese general who liberated Taiwan from the Viking conquerors from Holland.

The tournament involved the national quintet of Hong Kong and a pair of nationally ranked teams from Singapore and Indonesia. Together with Johnny's Durable Dozen, they clashed with towering Chinese squads from Guangdong Province and Fujian for five straight days in a one-round robin, winner-take-all affair.

The Filipinos, rated third behind Hong Kong and Fujian's Nanan team, swept the field but that's going ahead of the story.

Hong Kong was seeded No. 1 because it boasted of eight nationals, including a pair of two 6-8s. It was the same team that beat another RP quintet that had Rommel Adducul in it some time ago in the former British colony.

Hong Kong would again play a major role in the China campaign. Only this time, the Hong Kong quintet would absorb from Johnny's Durable Dozen a beating too bizarre and spooky that they won't forget for as long as they live.

Marching unbeaten to the finals with similar 4-0 cards, Hong Kong and the Philippines battled for the championship in a manner whose ending resembled a script plucked from a Harry Potter episode. Fantasy with a ghastly twist.

Up by 20 points with a quarter left, 76-56, Hong Kong suddenly lost touch with reality and squandered away the margin in no time to hand the victory to Johnny's Durable Dozen.

It happened in just a little over four minutes, when the Filipinos detonated a 23-0 bomb to grab the lead for good at 79-76. It was as if an ill wind blew Hong Kong out of the coliseum, its players suddenly playing something other than basketball. They bought their first basket with 7:07 gone in the period, when they had totally lost grip of the game.

"They seemed suddenly lost after we hit them with those five triples," Johnny Tam would tell me later, referring to Britt Reroma's three treys that were followed by Ricky Ricafrente's own two triples. "I told them to back up their fighting spirit with patience and thank God we made it."

Reroma's total of 11 in that deadly quarter was matched by John Ferriols, who topped scoring for the team with 22.

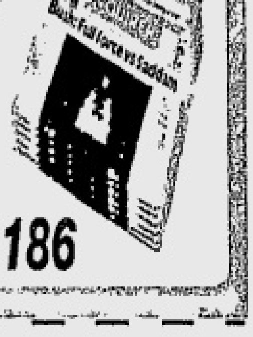
Other heroes in RP's 90-86 championship victory were the 6-foot-6 Brian Ilad, whose four straight freethrows in the crunch proved decisive, and Marc Macapagal and Ryan Bernardo, both with 14 points apiece. Completing Johnny's Durable Dozen were Danny Capobres, MC Caceres, Mike Buendia, Jun Gabica, Rodel Chua and Cris Corbin.

I'm personally happy for Johnny Tam if only because a while back, he got crucified for an ugly international outing that was not of his creation entirely. He coached a team that wasn't worthy of overseas battle because the supposed soldiers for the mission had backed out at the last minute for one reason or another. The Philippines stood to be fined if it did not send a team. In short, the country chose humiliation—and poor Johnny suffered for it.

"But I've recovered from that nightmare," said Johnny Tam, 37, an Adamson alumnus. "My fault, too, of course because I accepted the job. But I am at peace with myself now."

He should be. He is 3-of-4 in international play, including that second win in chilly China on Saturday, after first winning the tournament in 1999. He also won one last year for the country in Hong Kong.

Always, the road to victory isn't strewn with roses. But it sure is welded with durable stuff. Like Johnny's Durable Dozen.



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McGrady spins one for Magic

TORONTO—Tracy McGrady scored 29 points and Juwan Howard had 20 points and 12 rebounds to help the Orlando Magic to their third straight victory, 104-93, over the Toronto Raptors on Sunday.

Drew Gooden added 14 points and 14 rebounds, and Rod Strickland had 14 points and eight assists. The Magic has won six of eight since snapping a franchise-record 19-game losing skid.

McGrady guided the Magic to victory but credits Strickland for turning the team around. Orlando is 3-0 since he became a starter.

"He's doing everything for us. We have a solid veteran point guard. He's the reason why we're playing so well," McGrady said.

It was the Raptors' fifth loss in six games. Vince Carter added 17 points, but had five turnovers.

In Boston, Paul Pierce scored 31 points, Jiri Welsch added 22 and the Boston Celtics overcame a 12-point deficit in the final quarter to defeat Philadelphia, 87-84, and move ahead of the 76ers in the Atlantic Division.

Allen Iverson missed his fourth consecutive game because of a right knee contusion.

In Sacramento, California, Peja Stojakovic hit five 3-pointers while scoring 29 points, and Vlade Divac had 26 as the Kings downed the Portland Trail Blazers, 117-98, for their seventh win in eight games.

The team with the NBA's best home record made sure Portland remained the league's only winless road team, dropping the Blazers to 0-9.

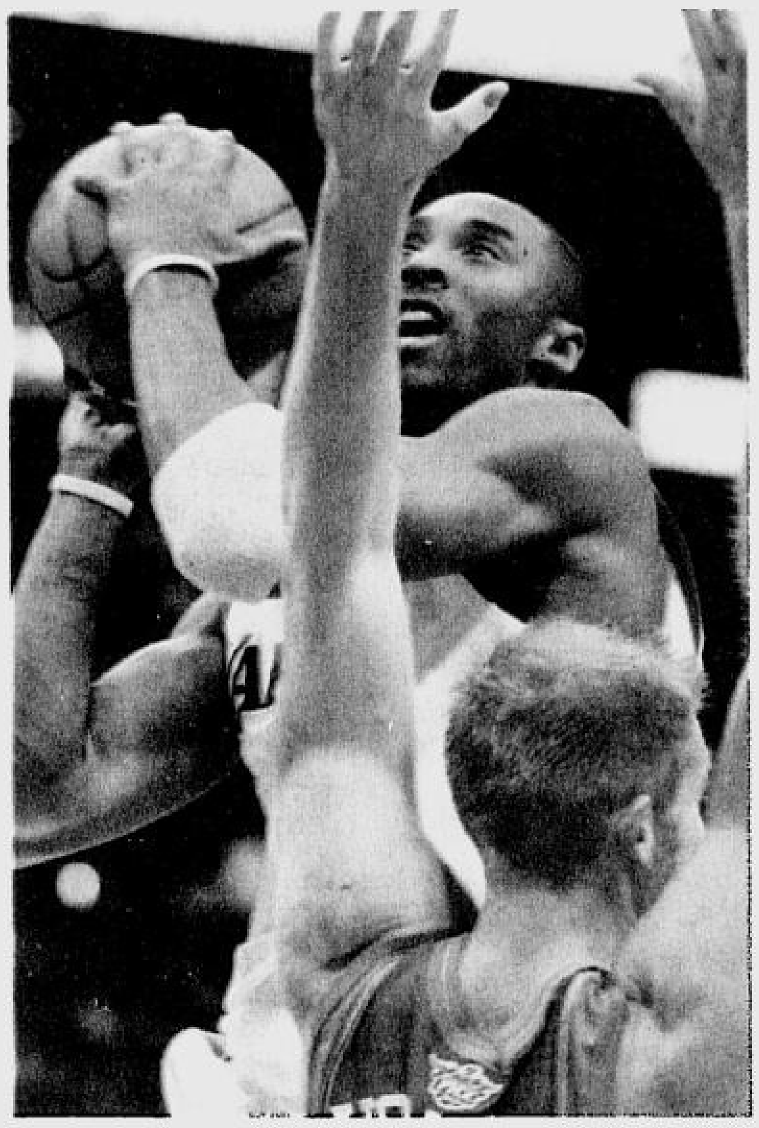
It was Sacramento's 14th win in 15 home games.

In Los Angeles, Karl Malone went down with a knee injury but the Lakers still won for the 10th time in 12 games—107-101 over the Phoenix Suns—behind 19 points apiece from Devean George and Gary Payton.

Shaquille O'Neal added 18 points and 18 rebounds as the Lakers improved the NBA's best record to 20-5.

Malone fell hard to the floor and grabbed his knee after being fouled by Scott Williams four minutes into the first quarter. The diagnosis was a right knee sprain, and X-rays didn't reveal any damage. He has missed only 11 games in his 19 NBA seasons—six due to injuries or illness and five because of suspensions. *AP*

Other results: Pistons 96, Jazz 75; Heat 104, Warriors 93.



KOBE Bryant of the Los Angeles Lakers goes up for a shot against Phoenix Suns center Jake Voskuhl during the two teams' game Sunday. *AP*

Hotshot Gabica extends billiards reign to 5th week

BACK-TO-BACK Tokyo 9-Ball Open champion Antonio "Gaga" Gabica easily beat Pampanga's Nestor Ocampo, 5-2, yesterday to extend for the fifth straight week his reign as the featured cue artist of the "Search for Tanduay the No. 1 Billiards Player" at the Robinsons Malls.

Ocampo managed to keep pace with the victor only in the first two racks, 1-1, before Gabica claimed the next three with excellent shotmaking in the match sponsored by Tanduay the No. 1 Rhum, Robinsons Malls and Rommel's Billiards.

Gabica dropped the sixth rack before cleaning up in the seventh for the victory.

Another budding talent tries to unseat Gabica in the sixth week of the challenge this Sunday.

The "Search for Tanduay the No. 1 Billiards Player" is still accepting challengers who believe they have the talent to become the next Filipino billiards superstar. The event was conceptualized by Tanduay advertising manager Larry Li, with the support of Tanduay Distillers marketing manager Andres Co.

For inquiries, call the Corporate Billiards League secretariat at 0918-9219934 or log on to www.corporatebilliardsleague@-yahoo.com

Serena pulls out of Hopman

PERTH, Australia—Serena Williams withdrew Monday from next month's Hopman Cup here so that she could fully prepare for the Australian Open just over two weeks later, tournament organizers said.

The world No. 3, who has not played competitively since winning Wimbledon last July, had been due to partner James Blake to defend the crown they won last year. The Australian Open begins Jan. 19. *AFP*

Salud wants Gorres in Pacquiao undercard

By Salven L. Lagumbay, *Contributor*

TOP-RANKED flyweight Z Gorres is being groomed to fight in the undercard of the March unification match between people's champion Manny Pacquiao and WBA/IBF featherweight boss Juan Manuel Marquez.

Lawyer Rodrigo Salud, who manages the cat-quick Gorres, told the INQUIRER that should Gorres hurdle a non-title bout sometime next month in Cebu, he would be sent to the United States to train under Freddie Roach and give him a chance to fight there.

"I want Botsoy (Gorres) to fight one more here, then we go to the US. Maybe two fights in the US, then we come back to the Philippines in search of that elusive world crown," Salud said.

Salud wants Gorres to fight WBC superfly champ Masamori Tokuyama, who twice thwarted Salud's former protege, Gerry Peñalosa.

Gorres, who has a 15-1 win-loss record with 9 KOs, beat RP superfly champ Eric Barcelona by split decision last Saturday in Subic.

Meanwhile, world champion Malcolm Tuñacao is shopping around for a new manager. His five-year contract with Rex "Wakee" Salud ends today.

A Japanese businessman, Yasuo Matsuoka of Tokyo, is reportedly interested in managing the affairs of the 26-year-old southpaw Tuñacao, formerly the World Boxing Council flyweight titlist.

Marty Elorde, son of the great Flash Elorde, is also interested in managing Tuñacao.

Ironically, it was Salud who steered Tuñacao to the WBC flyweight crown on May 19, 2000.

Araneta Center
ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE
ALI MALL CINEPLEX 7
Ali 1 GENIE, BAKIT?
Ali 2 ALIPIN
Ali 3 CABIN FEVER
Ali 4 LOST ISLAND
Ali 5 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
Ali 6 INTOLERABLE CRUELTY
Ali 7 MYSTIC RIVER
NEW FIESTA CARNIVAL
NOW OPEN 4 PM to 10 PM daily
ARANETA COLISEUM
DEC 22 DISNEY ON ICE-CHARITY PREMIERE 8PM
DEC 23 DISNEY ON ICE-GRAND OPENING 8PM
DEC 25 DISNEY ON ICE - 4:30PM / 8:00PM
DEC 26 DISNEY ON ICE - 4:30PM / 8:00PM
DEC 27 DISNEY ON ICE - 1PM / 4:30PM / 8PM
DEC 28 DISNEY ON ICE - 1PM / 4:30PM / 8PM
DEC 29 DISNEY ON ICE - 4:30PM / 8 PM
FOR TICKETS, CALL TICKETNET AT 911-5555

PROUD PRIDE: San Beda's Red Booters, four-time football champions this year, with coach Aris Caslib and spiritual leader and No. 1 fan Fr. Lukas (eighth from left, back row).

Red Booters supply big kick for SBC

By June Navarro

THE RED Lions enjoyed, as always, the roaring support from the alumni but it's the Red Booters who've given San Beda its brightest sports achievement this year by kicking the opposition around.

Under the guidance of its German-trained coach Aris Caslib and Fr. Lukas (OSB), its No. 1 fan, the Mendiola-based booters have dominated the football scene to finish with a glittering harvest of four championships.

The Red Booters started their winning streak with a second straight NCAA crown and then topped the Unigames, which assembled the best football teams in the country.

They also asserted themselves in the Ang Liga, a league pitting the top teams in the UAAP and NCAA, and the Special 7-a-Side tournament of the Rizal Football Association.

"Football is one sport where Filipinos can excel given a wide range of pool talents, especially from the countryside. But it lacks support," said Fr. Lukas, facilitator of San Beda's football program the last four years.

"Look at our team. We've won four tournaments this year with hardly any support, even from the alumni. We cannot do it by ourselves, that's why I wanted to convey a message to them (alumni) to re-direct their focus from say, basketball, and take a look at our football squad," added Fr. Lukas, a member of San Beda high school's class of '75.

Caslib, who is ably supported at San Beda by his assistants Aris Santos, Ryan dela Cruz, Abu Torres and John Servita, had piloted the San Beda juniors to an unprecedented 10 straight championships before bringing his act to the collegiate level.

His top striker is Dan Padernal, a 22-year-old find from the football-crazy province of Sta. Barbara, Iloilo, who stands out as the take-charge guy in the team composed of 28 players with ages ranging from 16-22 years old, 40 percent of which came from San Beda high.

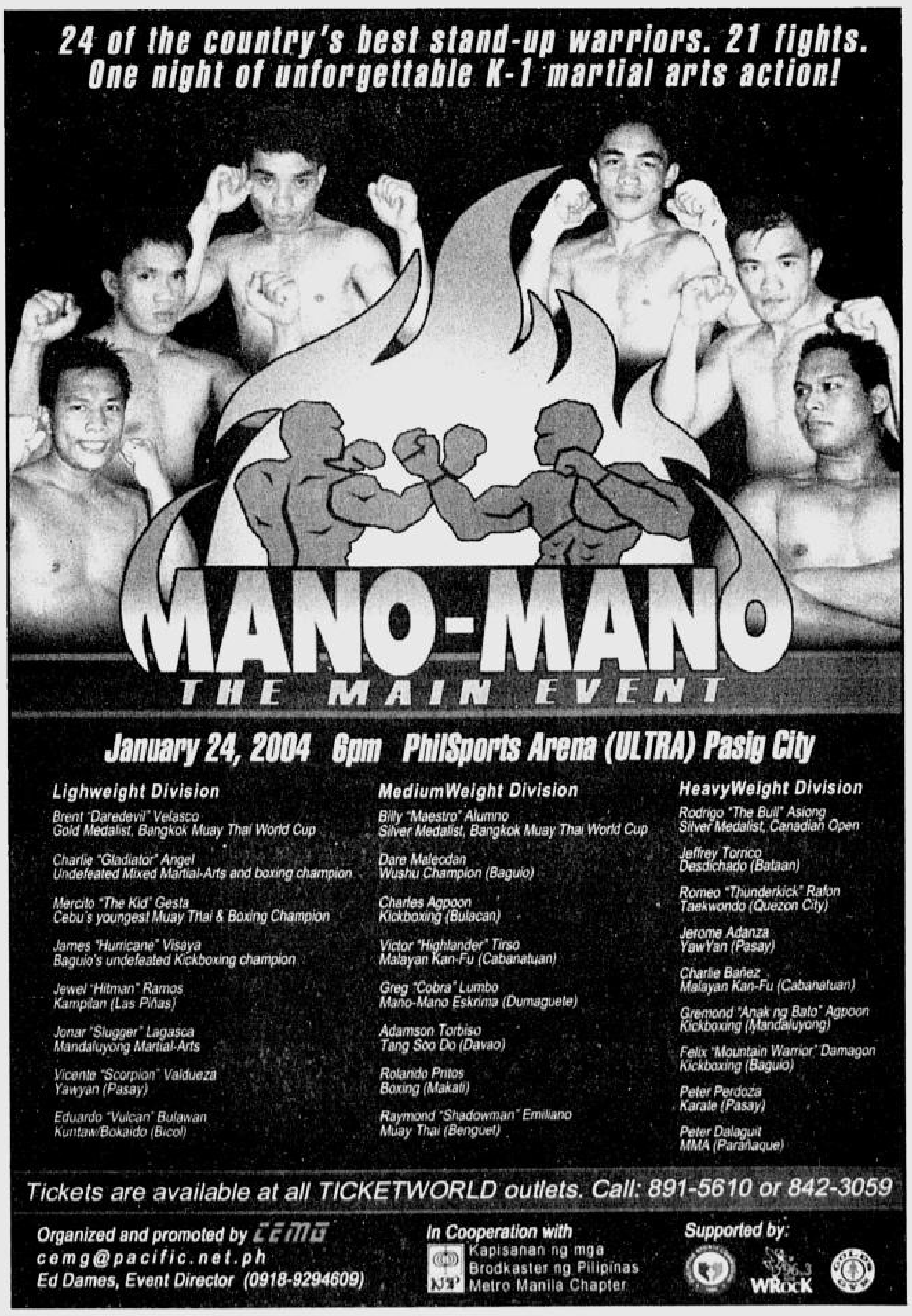
Other members of the team are Mark Villon (defender), Vaughn Melendrez (striker), Ahmed Tahil (striker), Voltaire Pacia (midfielder), Paolo Gamalinda (goalkeeper), Karl Tan (midfielder), Kevin Vicente (striker); Jeffrey Liman (midfielder), Ruffy Narvaez (defender), Gene Abela (goalkeeper), Arnold Carino (midfielder), Ace Intrepido (defender), Gerald Orcullo (midfielder), Darell Castro (midfielder/defender); Arvin Carandang (striker), Christian Canarosa (striker) Jessan Candolesa (defender), Paolo Apacible (midfielder), RJ Romero (striker), Jeremias Jiao (midfielder), Michael Casas (goalkeeper), Donald Somoza (midfielder), James Dimaculangan (striker), Edberg Buenaseda (defender), Billy Corpuz (striker) and Japet Sablon (defender).

NATIONAL team coach Caslib and eight of his players came close to competing in the recent SEA Games in Vietnam.

Half of the team came from the countryside but Caslib, who honed his coaching skills in Germany, said that unlike basketball, the school doesn't offer much, only board and lodging plus a full scholarship at SBC.

Caslib, as the national team coach, and eight of his players came close to competing in the last Southeast Asian Games in Vietnam until football was excluded from the Philippine contingent at the last minute for failing to meet the criteria set by the SEA Games Technical Commission.

It was a setback for Caslib and his players, but it won't stop the Red Booters from bringing glory to their alma mater, with alumni support or none.



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Mercito "The Kid" Gesta
Cebu's youngest Muay Thai & Boxing Champion
James "Hurricane" Visaya
Baguio's undefeated Kickboxing champion
Jewel "Hitman" Ramos
Kampilan (Las Piñas)
Jonar "Slugger" Lagasca
Mandaluyong Martial-Arts
Vicente "Scorpion" Valdueza
Yawyan (Pasay)
Eduardo "Vulcan" Bulawan
Kuntaw/Bokaido (Bicol)

MediumWeight Division
Billy "Maestro" Alumno
Silver Medalist, Bangkok Muay Thai World Cup
Dare Maleodan
Wushu Champion (Baguio)
Charles Agpoon
Kickboxing (Bulacan)
Victor "Highlander" Tirso
Malayan Kan-Fu (Cabanatuan)
Greg "Cobra" Lumbo
Mano-Mano Eskrima (Dumaguete)
Adamson Torbiso
Tang Soo Do (Davao)
Rolando Pntos
Boxing (Makati)
Raymond "Shadowman" Emiliano
Muay Thai (Benguet)

HeavyWeight Division
Rodrigo "The Bull" Asiong
Silver Medalist, Canadian Open
Jeffrey Torrico
Desdichado (Bataan)
Romeo "Thunderkick" Rafon
Taekwondo (Quezon City)
Jerome Adanza
YawYan (Pasay)
Charlie Bañez
Malayan Kan-Fu (Cabanatuan)
Gremond "Anak ng Bato" Agpoon
Kickboxing (Mandaluyong)
Felix "Mountain Warrior" Damagon
Kickboxing (Baguio)
Peter Perdoza
Karate (Pasay)
Peter Dalaguit
MMA (Parañaque)

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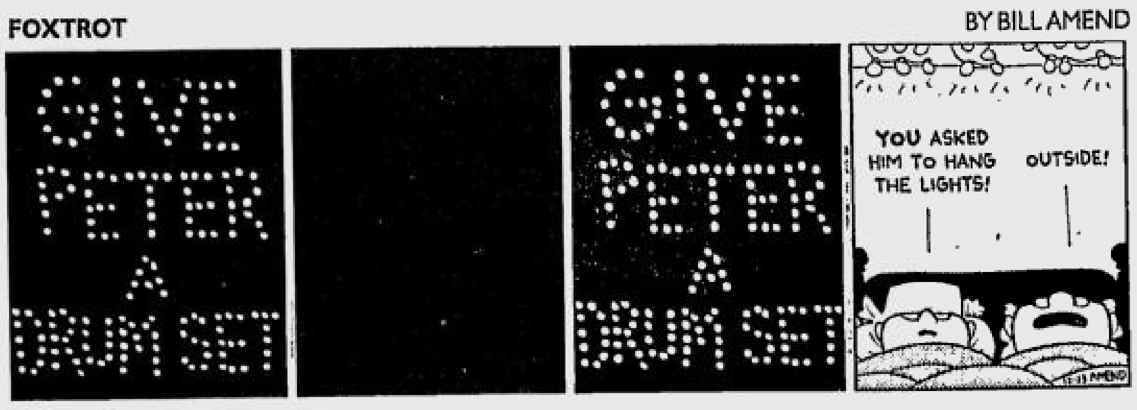
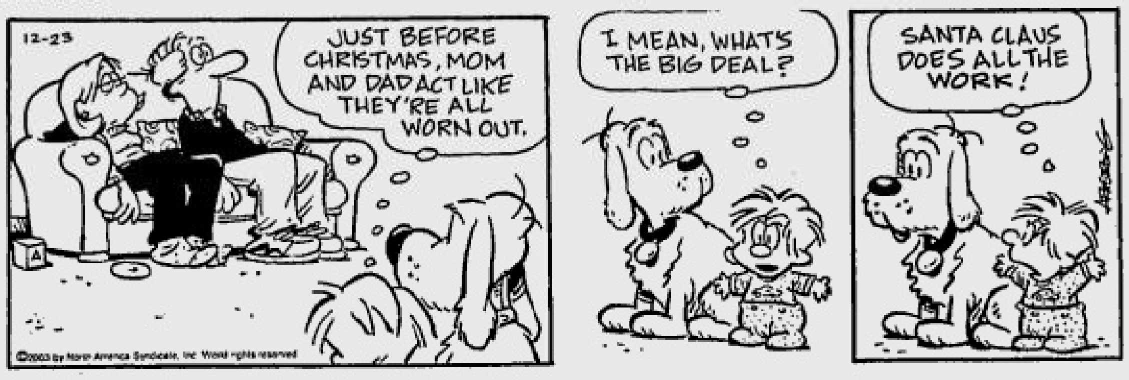
FOXTROT

BY BILL AMEND


GIVE PETER A DRUM SET
GIVE PETER A DRUM SET
YOU ASKED HIM TO HANG THE LIGHTS!
OUTSIDE!
12-23 AMEND

MARVIN

BY TOM ARMSTRONG


12-23
JUST BEFORE CHRISTMAS, MOM AND DAD ACT LIKE THEY'RE ALL WORN OUT.
I MEAN, WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?
SANTA CLAUS DOES ALL THE WORK!
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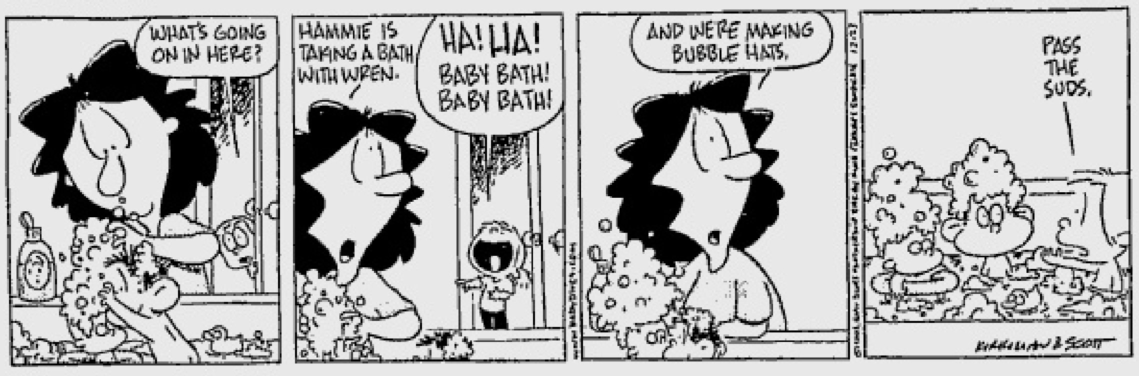
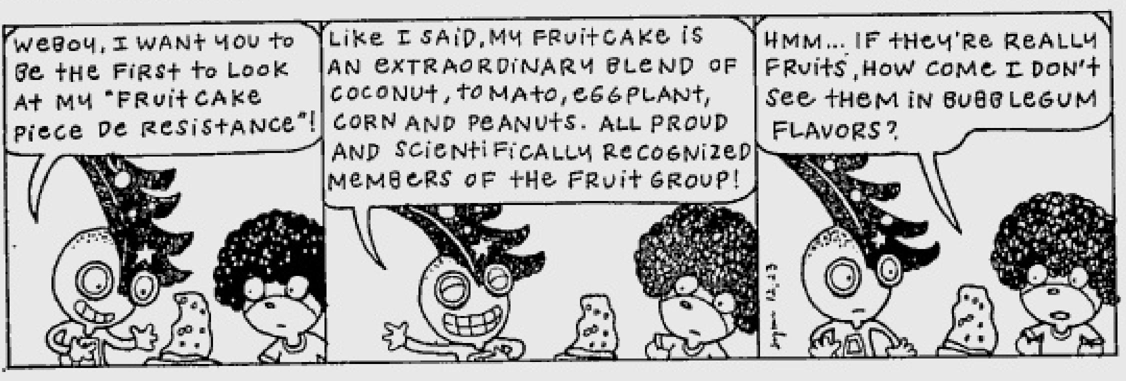
BABY BLUES

BY JERRY SCOTT


WHAT'S GOING ON IN HERE?
HAMMIE IS TAKING A BATH WITH WREN.
HA! HA! BABY BATH! BABY BATH!
AND WE'RE MAKING BUBBLE HATS.
PASS THE SUDS.
KIRKMAN & SCOTT

ATOMO AND WEBOY

BY LYRA GARCELLANO


WEBOY, I WANT YOU TO BE THE FIRST TO LOOK AT MY "FRUITCAKE PIECE DE RESISTANCE"!
LIKE I SAID, MY FRUITCAKE IS AN EXTRAORDINARY BLEND OF COCONUT, TOMATO, EGGPLANT, CORN AND PEANUTS. ALL PROUD AND SCIENTIFICALLY RECOGNIZED MEMBERS OF THE FRUIT GROUP!
HMM... IF THEY'RE REALLY FRUITS, HOW COME I DON'T SEE THEM IN BUBBLEGUM FLAVORS?
12-23

HOROSCOPE

BY FRANCIS DRAKE

YOU BORN TODAY: You're easy-going and good-natured. Because you love to try out new ideas, you often make improvements to your surroundings—especially to group activities. You want recognition for your efforts. Your shrewd judgment of character helps you enormously. Expect major changes in your life in the year ahead (changes for the better).
Birthdate of: Corey Haim, actor; Yousuf Karsh, photographer; Susan Lucci, TV soap actress.

ARIES (March 21 to April 19): Take some time today to think about where you're headed. Where do you want to be 10 years from now? What do you have to do now to get there?

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20): In order to live all the days of your life, learning something new and expanding your knowledge is vital. What can you do to explore new systems of thought and philosophy?

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20): Think about the fairest way to share something with someone else. Tell others what you think. Remember: Good business is always mutually beneficial.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22): Think about how you can improve your relationships with those closest to you. Today's New Moon is the perfect time to ponder this. (You must be as good for your partner as well.)

LEO (July 23 to Aug. 22): What can you do to improve your health? Is there one harmful thing you can diminish or remove from your daily habit patterns? If so, try it.

VIRGO (Aug. 23 to Sept. 22): Never underestimate the importance of expressing your creative talents. You don't have to sell what you create. The doing is all that matters, because you're a verb, not a noun.

LIBRA (Sept. 23 to Oct. 22): Make contact with family members. It's important to stay in touch with those with whom you have history. It helps put life in perspective.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 to Nov. 21): Think about how important the good will of those you encounter every day actually is to you. Do not take this for granted. Furthermore, show others that you care for them as well.

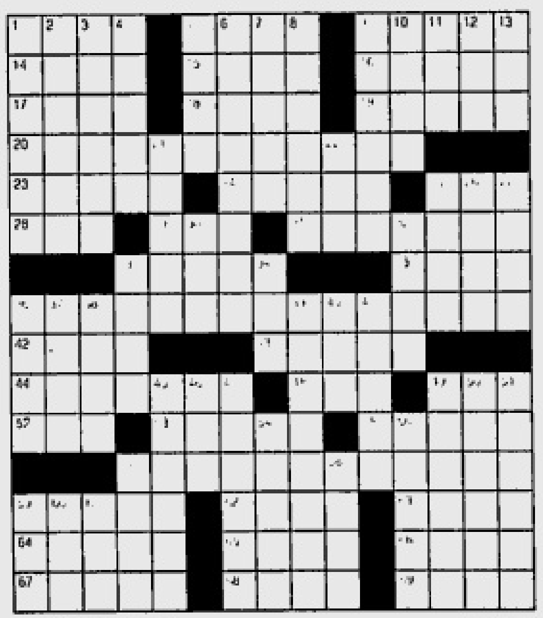
SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 to Dec. 21): Do you own your possessions, or do they own you? This is the perfect day to ponder your relationship to your assets and earnings.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 to Jan. 19): Today's New Moon is in your sign. Think about how you can improve your appearance and your style of relating to others. (The New Moon is always a good time for new resolutions.)

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18): You need more solitude to think about life and to pull your act together. Don't let others pull you in too many directions at once. Protect yourself.

PISCES (Feb. 19 to March 20): Take a moment today to think about how important friendship is to you. No man is an island (or even a peninsula).

DAILY CROSSWORD



By Janet R. Bender
Somerset, PA
12/23/03

ACROSS
1 Roe source
5 Fake
9 VCR function
14 Ripped
15 House go-fer
16 Citizen with a voice
17 & others
18 McGregor of "Emma"
19 Japanese immigrant
20 Absolute musical skill
23 Rio de la __
24 Ticker
25 Actress West
28 Superlative suffix
29 "Citizen Kane" studio
31 Cave in the Dordogne
33 Cubic meter
35 Broadway opening?
36 One way to reach the green
42 Zone
43 Relinquish
44 Persian governors
48 Trail behind
49 Gray shade
52 Driver's peg
53 City southeast of Bombay
55 "__ la vista, baby!"
57 American Revolution heroine
59 Chisel edge
62 In addition
63 Keep in custody
64 Just right
65 Ethan or Joel of movies
66 __ Stanley Gardner
67 Housing option
68 Concludes
69 College VIP

DOWN
1 Siberian plain
2 Travel lodging
3 Ark's peak
4 Dutch pottery
5 On __ (without guarantee)
6 Mayflower
7 Wide open
8 Servant
9 Dislodges
10 Banter teasingly
11 UFO crew
12 Middling grade
13 Cycle starter?
21 Third planet
22 La-la lead-in
25 Speed-of-sound measure
26 Mobile starter?
27 Way out
30 Cyclades island
32 Play players
33 Flesh mark
34 Byrnes or Roush
36 Gone by
37 "Dies __"
38 Lyons head
39 Backslid
40 Thurman of "Batman & Robin"
41 Dark period
45 Twin of Artemis
46 PAC beneficiary
47 Comfort
49 On land
50 "A Streetcar Named Desire" character
51 Set
54 Synthetic fabric
56 Was sore
57 Hoover Dam's lake
58 Saturn models
59 Pen name?
60 Tokyo, once
61 __ Buddhism

Monday's Puzzle Solved

F	I	D	E	I	■	R	E	T	I	P	■	R	A	P
A	W	A	R	E	■	E	R	A	T	O	■	I	R	A
N	O	R	M	A	N	B	A	T	E	S	■	C	I	I
S	N	E	A	K	O	U	T	■	■	T	A	K	E	N
■	■	■	■	A	N	T	■	G	R	U	M	B	L	E
T	O	B	A	G	O	■	P	L	U	R	A	L	■	■
O	R	A	T	E	■	S	H	A	N	E	■	A	S	S
M	E	R	E	■	L	E	A	D	S	■	L	I	T	E
B	O	N	■	S	E	N	S	E	■	H	E	N	E	W
■	■	E	S	T	A	T	E	■	S	E	V	E	N	S
D	A	Y	T	O	N	A	■	T	O	T	■	■	■	■
I	N	F	E	R	■	■	M	O	L	A	S	S	E	S
O	N	I	■	M	A	R	Y	P	O	P	P	I	N	S
D	E	F	■	E	W	E	R	S	■	E	A	T	I	N
E	X	E	■	R	E	P	A	Y	■	S	T	U	D	S

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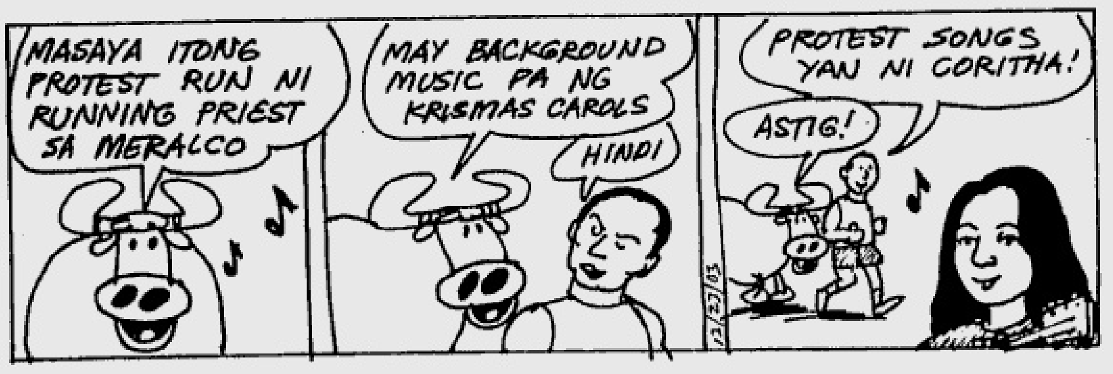
12/23/03

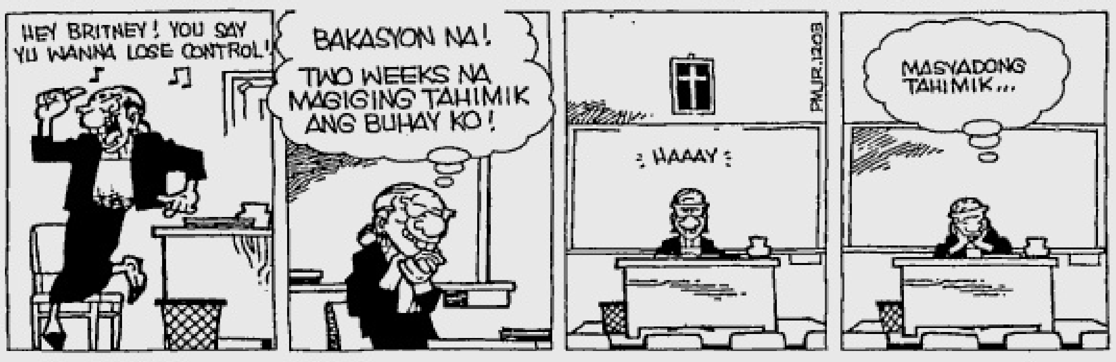
A. LIPIN

BY JESS ABRERA


MASAYA ITONG PROTEST RUN NI RUNNING PRIEST SA MERALCO
MAY BACKGROUND MUSIC PA NG KRISMAS CAROLS
HINDI
12/23/03
PROTEST SONGS YAN NI CORITHA!
ASTIG!

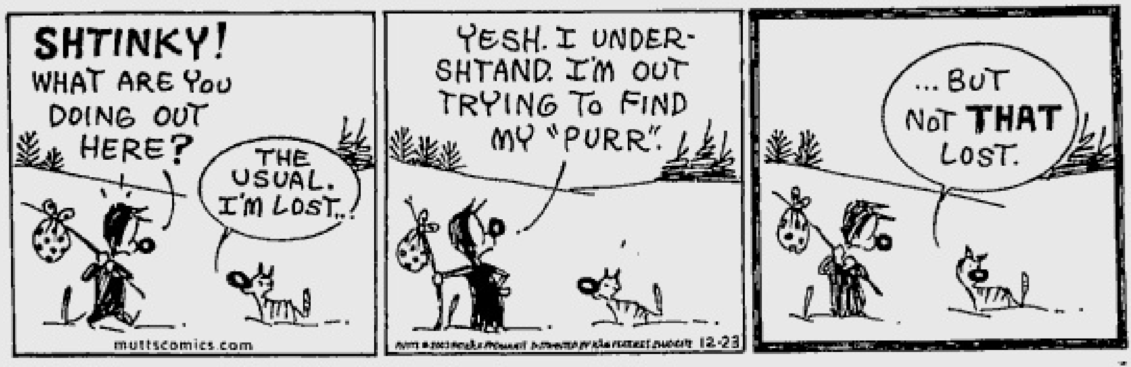
PUGAD BABOY

BY P.M. JUNIOR


HEY BRITNEY! YOU SAY YU WANNA LOSE CONTROL!
BAKASYON NA! TWO WEEKS NA MAGIGING TAHIMIK ANG BUHAY KO!
PMJR.1203
HAAAY
MASYADONG TAHIMIK...

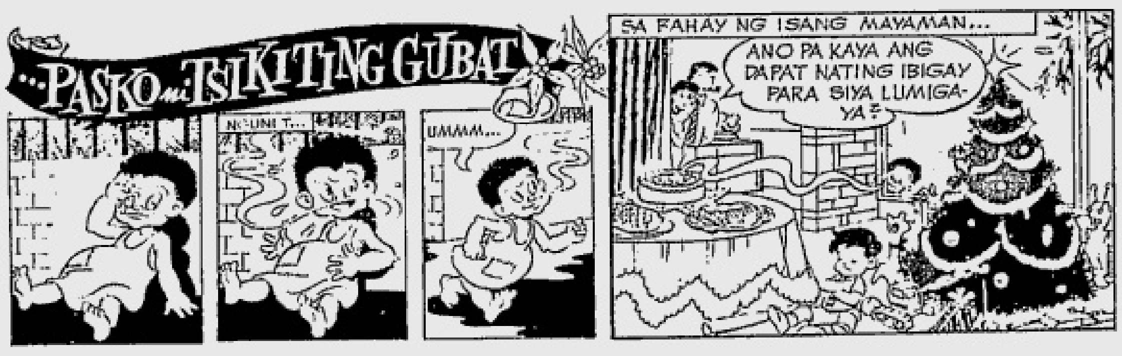
MUTTS

BY PATRICK McDONNELL


SHTINKY! WHAT ARE YOU DOING OUT HERE?
THE USUAL. I'M LOST...
muttscomics.com
YESH. I UNDERSHTAND. I'M OUT TRYING TO FIND MY "PURR".
12-23
...BUT NOT THAT LOST.

KENKOY KLASIKS

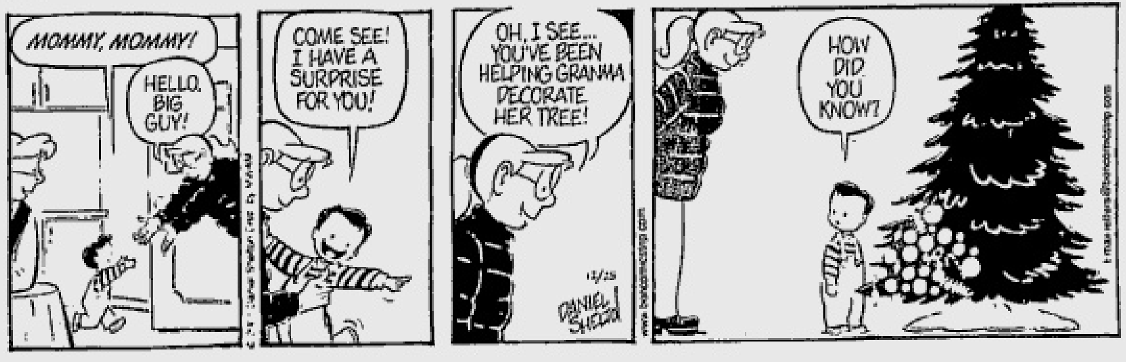
BY TONY VELASQUEZ


PASKO ni TSIKITING GUBAT
NGUNI T...
UMMM...
SA BAHAY NG ISANG MAYAMAN...
ANO PA KAYA ANG DAPAT NATING IBIGAY PARA SIYA LUMIGAYA?

COURTESY OF KOMIKS CAFE

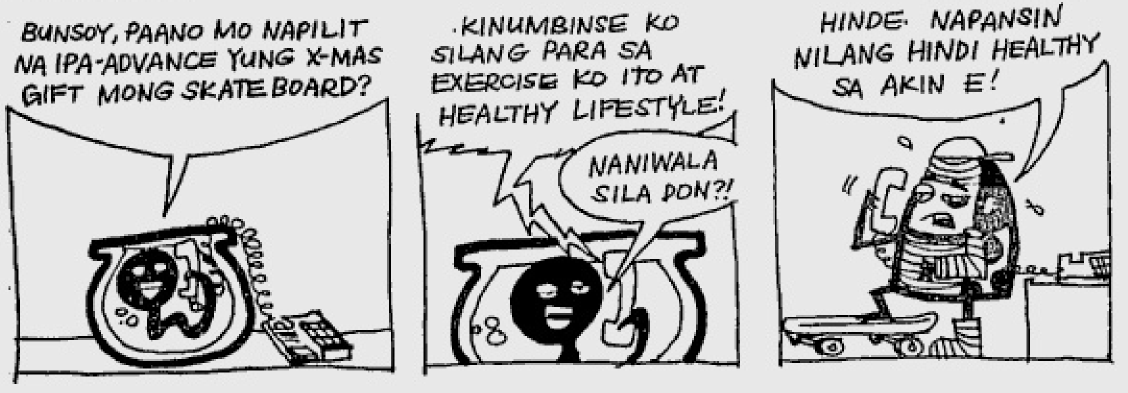
BEN

BY DANIEL SHELTON


MOMMY, MOMMY!
HELLO, BIG GUY!
COME SEE! I HAVE A SURPRISE FOR YOU!
OH, I SEE... YOU'VE BEEN HELPING GRANMA DECORATE HER TREE!
12/23
DANIEL SHELTON
HOW DID YOU KNOW?

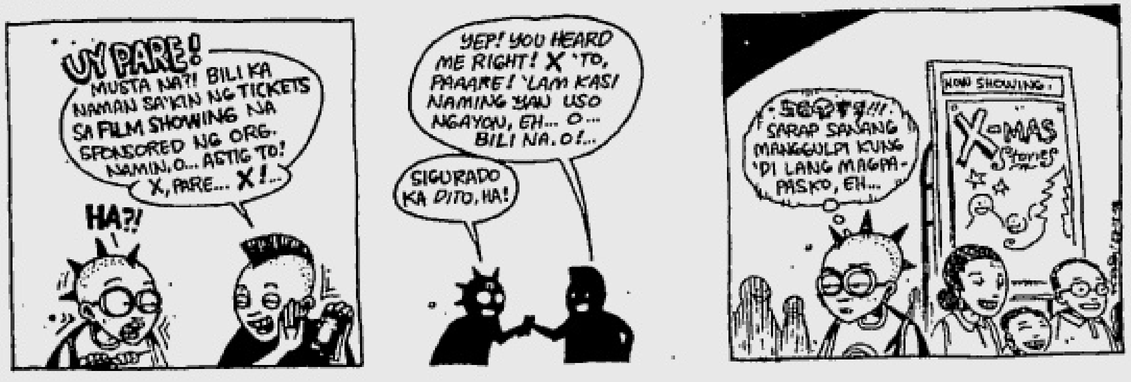
MIKROKOSMOS

BY JOMIKE TEJIDO


BUNSOY, PAANO MO NAPILIT NA IPA-ADVANCE YUNG X-MAS GIFT MONG SKATEBOARD?
KINUMBINSE KO SILANG PARA SA EXERCISE KO ITO AT HEALTHY LIFESTYLE!
NANIWALA SILA DON?!
HINDE. NAPANSIN NILANG HINDI HEALTHY SA AKIN E!

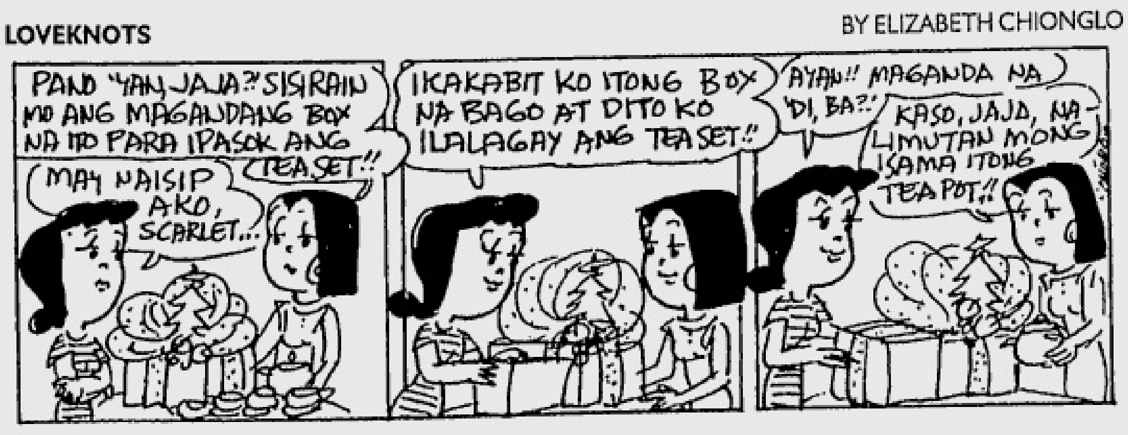
KIKO MACHINE

BY MANIX ABRERA


UY PARE! MUSTA NA?! BILI KA NAMAN SA'KIN NG TICKETS SA FILM SHOWING NA SPONSORED NG ORG. NAMIN, O... ASTIG TO! X, PARE... X!..
HA?!
YEP! YOU HEARD ME RIGHT! X 'TO, PAAARE! 'LAM KASI NAMING YAN USO NGAYON, EH... O... BILI NA, O!...
SIGURADO KA DITO, HA!
NOW SHOWING
X-MAS Stories
SOOTS!!! SARAP SANANG MANGGULPI KUNG 'DI LANG MAGPA-PASKO, EH...

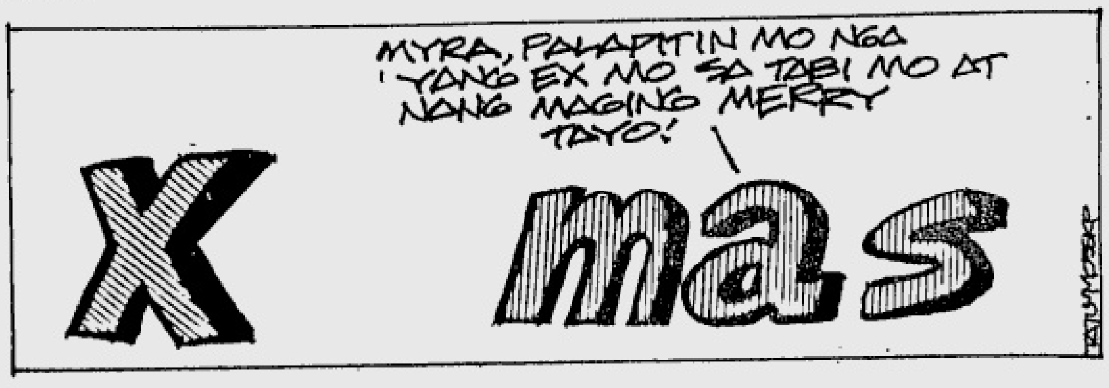
LOVEKNOTS

BY ELIZABETH CHIONGLO


PANO 'YAN, JAJA?! SISIRAIN MO ANG MAGANDANG BOX NA ITO PARA IPASOK ANG TEA SET!!
MAY NAISIP AKO, SCARLET...
IKAKABIT KO ITONG BOX NA BAGO AT DITO KO ILALAGAY ANG TEA SET!!
AYAN!! MAGANDA NA 'DI, BA?!
KASO, JAJA, NALIMUTAN MONG ISAMA ITONG TEA POT!!

TULDOK

BY PAPU AND TATUM MILAMBILING


MYRA, PALAPITIN MO NGA 'YANG EX MO SA TABI MO AT NANG MAGING MERRY TAYO!
X
mas
TATUM

Merry memories...

From page A26

hoping to win the grand prize?

Ricky, Clara and I used to joke that every time we woke up on Christmas Day, it seemed like there was a People Power rally going on in the garden because there was a sea of people waiting for you to come out. Your room looked liked the Mt. Everest of gifts as early as September. Like elves, your *alalays* wrapped gifts all day long. You treasured Christmas cards more than the gifts you got especially when they were from simple folk because you knew they were the most sincere ones. You didn't like writing "Xmas" instead of "Christmas" and you reminded the kids to write it properly.

You surprised me with the two dozens of lighted white tulips I had always wanted. We went to a shop and I told you I wanted the tulip lights, but since you didn't bring enough cash you asked if they would accept a check. They wouldn't, so we went home and I told myself the tulip lights were not that cool anyway. Then on Christmas Day you made me cry when you got the lights for me and your card read, "Just to show you that there is absolutely nothing I won't do for you because I love you so much! Merry Christmas my Taxina!"

The tulips lights are still in my pad. They remind me of the

MERRY/ A24

SM CINEMA

SM Dial-A-Movie 833-9999

NOW SHOWING

SM CITY NORTH EDSA
9295452

1 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
2 CABIN FEVER
3 ALIPIN
4 THE GRUDGE
5 INTOLERABLE CRUELTY
6 LOST ISLAND
7 LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS
8 MYSTIC RIVER

SM CITY CEBU
2313876

1 DARK BLUE
2 RUGRATS GO WILD
3 SCARY MOVIE 3
4 GOOD BOY!
5 ELF
6 ZHO YU'S TRAIN
7 THE GRUDGE
8 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2

SM CITY BACOOR
4173068

1 INTERNET QUEEN
2 SCARY MOVIE 3
3 LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS
4 LOST ISLAND
5 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
6 MR. SUAVE
7 HUWAG KANG KIKIBO
8 STAR RUNNER

SM CITY PAMPANGA
7126015

1 MYSTIC RIVER
2 RUGRATS GO WILD
3 CABIN FEVER
4 AKO, SIYA O IKAW
5 GOOD BOY!
6 STAR RUNNER

SM SUPER CTR. SUCAT
8294975

1 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
2 THE GRUDGE
3 LOST ISLAND
4 WWW.XXX.COM

SM BICUTAN
7763055

1 THE SPY
2 ASBOOBS
3 THE GRUDGE
4 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2

SM CITY MARILAO

1 LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS
2 SEX SCANDAL
3 CABIN FEVER
4 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2

SM STA. MESA
7149522 • 7161416

1 LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS
2 CABIN FEVER
3 MASTER & COMMANDER
4 LIBERATED
5 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
6 WISHMASTER 4
7 LOST ISLAND
8 INTOLERABLE CRUELTY
9 MATRIX REVOLUTIONS
10 MR. SUAVE

SM SOUTHMALL
8056888

1 LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS
2 CABIN FEVER
3 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
4 ELF
5 INTERNET QUEEN
6 ALIPIN
7 MR. SUAVE
8 LOST ISLAND
9 THE GRUDGE
10 INTOLERABLE CRUELTY

SM CITY FAIRVIEW
9350749

1 CABIN FEVER
2 MYSTIC RIVER
3 ALIPIN
4 LOST ISLAND
5 MR. SUAVE
6 THE GRUDGE
7 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
8 SCARY MOVIE 3
9 LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS
10 CHAVIT
11 JEANNIE, BAKIT NGAYON KA LANG
12 INTERNET QUEEN

SM CITY DAVAO
2976950

1 STAR RUNNER
2 WRONG TURN
3 ELF
4 SCARY MOVIE 3
5 GOOD BOY!
6 THE PHONE

SM CITY LUCENA
(042) 7100977-80

1 LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS
2 SCARY MOVIE 3
3 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
4 STAR RUNNER

SM MEGAMALL
6331001 • 6339401

1 MYSTIC RIVER
RESERVE-A-SEAT dial 6366800
2 FINAL DESTINATION 2
3 MATRIX REVOLUTIONS
4 MASTER & COMMANDER
5 INTOLERABLE CRUELTY
6 THE GRUDGE
7 STAR RUNNER
8 ELF
9 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
10 LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS
11 LOST ISLAND
12 LIBERATED

SM CINEMA TUTUBAN
2514302

1 LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS
2 LIBERATED
3 MR. SUAVE
4 LOST ISLAND

SM CITY ILOILO
3209422

1 RUGRATS GO WILD
2 RESERVED
3 STAR RUNNER
4 COLD CREEK MANOR
5 OUT OF TIME
6 SCARY MOVIE 3
7 RESERVED
8 ELF

SM CITY MANILA
5239240

1 CABIN FEVER
2 ELF
3 LOTR: THE TWO TOWERS
4 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
5 LOST ISLAND
6 INTOLERABLE CRUELTY
7 MYSTIC RIVER
8 JEANNIE, BAKIT NGAYON KA LANG
9 SCARY MOVIE 3
10 STAR RUNNER
11 INTERNET QUEEN
12 THE GRUDGE

SM CITY CAGAYAN DE ORO
(088) 8532884

1 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
2 COLD CREEK MANOR
3 ELF
4 OUT OF TIME

SM CITY BAGUIO
(074) 4464505

1 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
2 OUT OF TIME
3 SCARY MOVIE 3
4 FIGHTING TEMPTATIONS

THE PODIUM CINEMA

18 ADB Avenue, Ortigas Center, Mandaluyong City • 638 9781 - 85

1 LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS
6:00 fs, 6:30 mf, 9:30 lfs, 10:00 lmf, 1:00 end

2 MASTER AND COMMANDER: THE FAR SIDE OF THE WORLD
11:00 fs, 11:20 mf, 2:00, 4:40, 7:20, 9:40 lfs, 10:00 lmf, 12:20 end

For Seat Reservation, call 633 8975 • LATE NIGHT SCREENING DURING FRIDAYS AND SATURDAYS
Matinee P100.00 - Screening until 5pm • Monday thru Friday • Regular P120.00 - After 5pm • Saturday • Sunday • Holidays (Reserved Seating)

Movies are subject to change without prior notice

MOVIEWORLD CINEMAS @ Robinsons Malls

TOP MOVIE THEATER
Annual National
Consumer's Quality Award 2003

NOW SHOWING
DIAL-A-MOVIE FOR ALL BRANCHES 635-5555

Galleria 632- 9115- 16 687-0593

THX /All Digital

1 MYSTIC RIVER 1:20, 4:25, 7:15, 10:00 THX
2 LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING 11:30, 3:00, 6:00
3 LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS 11:00, 2:30, 6:00, 9:30
4 LOST ISLAND 10:20, 12:40, 3:00, 5:20, 7:40, 10:00
5 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2 10:50, 1:00, 3:10, 5:20, 7:30, 9:50
6 THE GRUDGE 12:50, 2:50, 4:50, 6:55, 9:00
7 CHICAGO 10:40, 12:50, 3:00, 5:10, 7:20, 9:30
8 INTOLERABLE CRUELTY 12:05, 2:15, 4:25, 6:30, 9:00
9 CABIN FEVER 10:50, 1:00, 3:10, 5:20, 7:30, 9:50
10 ELF 12:05, 2:15, 4:25, 6:30, 9:00

MATINEE PRICE: P100 THX cinema / P75 1level cinemas
Mon.- Fri. / 10am- 4pm (EXCEPT HOLIDAYS)

Ermita 526-7185 536-7809 to 12

1 MYSTIC RIVER - 11:25, 2:10, 4:55, 7:35, 10:00
2 ELF - 10:10, 12:10, 2:10, 4:10, 6:10, 8:00, 9:50
3 CLOSED FOR RENOVATION
4 LOTR: FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING - 11:20, 2:50, 6:20, 9:50
5 LOST ISLAND - - 10:10, 12:25, 2:40, 4:55, 7:15, 9:40
6 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2 - 11:15, 1:25, 3:40, 5:55, 8:10, 10:00
7 INTOLERABLE CRUELTY - 11:30, 1:40, 3:50, 6:00, 8:10, 10:00

Metro East Marcos hway 682-8193/09 682-8280

1 LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING
2 LOST ISLAND
3 INTOLERABLE CRUELTY
4 LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS
5 CABIN FEVER
6 LOONEY TUNES
7 MYSTIC RIVER
8 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2

Novaliches 935-3229 / 31

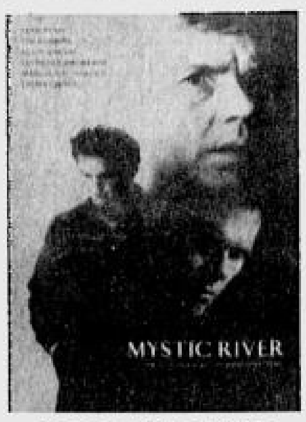
1 THE GRUDGE
2 LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING
3 LOST ISLAND
4 CABIN FEVER
5 LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS
6 JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
7 MYSTIC RIVER
8 GOOD BOY

Malabon 288-0985/2575		Cainta 240-4661
HUWAG KANG KIKIBO, SIYA ANG HIHIPO	1	THE MEDALLION
JENNIE BAKIT NGAYON KA LANG?	2	LOTR: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING
LOST ISLAND	3	LOTR : THE TWO TOWERS
BIKTIMA	4	BIKTIMA

Sta. Rosa Laguna (049)837-0907		Lipa, Batangas (043)757-3664/312-5870
CABIN FEVER	1	GOOD BOY
JENNIE BAKIT NGAYON KA LANG?	2	DARK BLUE
HUWAG KANG KIKIBO, SIYA ANG HIHIPO	3	ALIPIN
ALIPIN	4	INTOLERABLE CRUELTY
MYSTIC RIVER	5	LEGALLY BLONDE 2

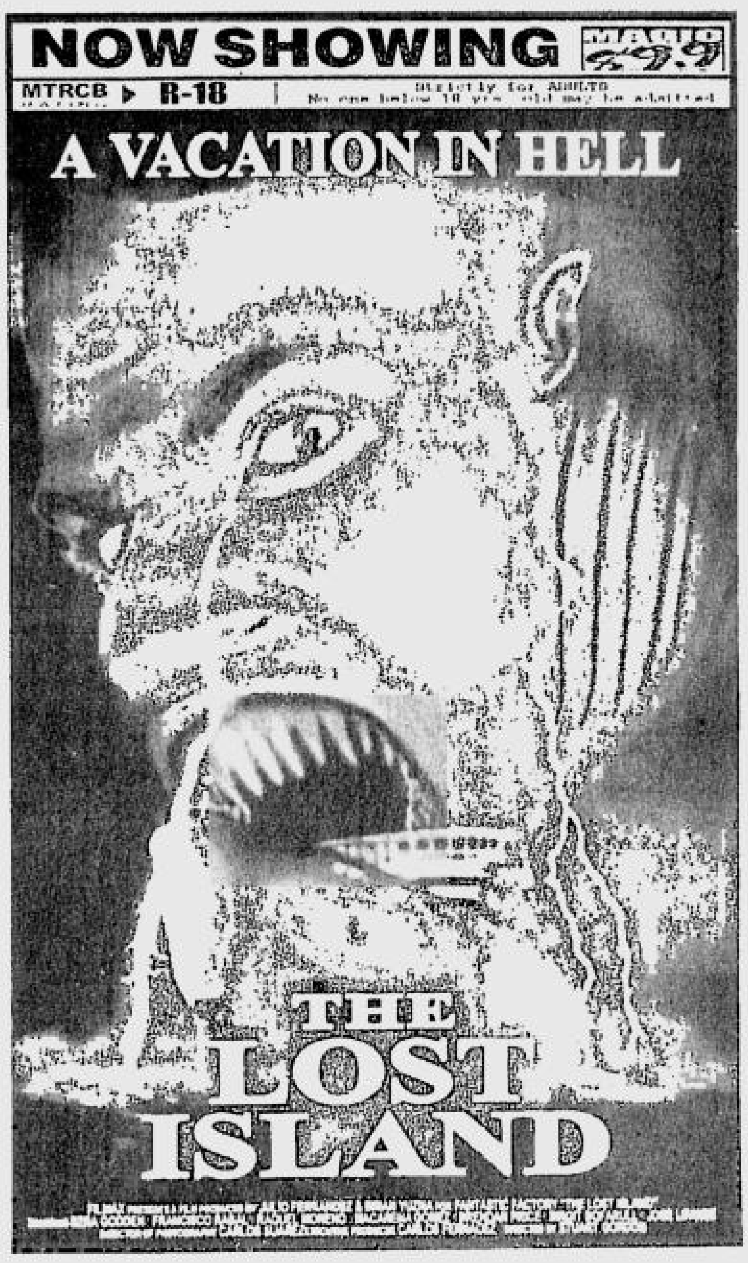
Star Mills (049)876-1027 (049)861-5270		Imus (046)471-8188 / 875-5858
CABIN FEVER	1	JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
RUGRATS GO WILD	2	LOST ISLAND
AKO SIYA IKAW	3	HUWAG KANG KIKIBO, SIYA ANG HIHIPO
STAR RUNNER	4	INTERNET QUEEN
GOOD BOY	5	LOTR:THE TWO TOWERS
MYSTIC RIVER	6	JENNIE BAKIT NGAYON KA LANG?

Bacolod (034)441-0458/59		Iloilo (033)336-8070 to 78
SCARY MOVIE 3	1	SCARY MOVIE 3
COLD CREEK MANOR	2	COLD CREEK MANOR
WRONG TURN	3	OUT OF TIME
RUGRATS GO WILD	4	STAR RUNNER
THE WISHER	5	ELF
SEX SCANDAL	6	RUGRATS GO WILD



NOW SHOWING
at Robinsons Movieworld Cinemas

MOVIES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE.



NOW SHOWING

MTRCB ▸ R-18 | Strictly for ADULTS No one below 18 yrs. old may be admitted

A VACATION IN HELL

THE LOST ISLAND

SEE IT FIRST!

SM CINEMA

Advance Screening

Invitational Snack Studio Inc. & Seiko Films Premiere

on Dec. 23, 2003 7:30 pm

SM Megamall Cinema 9

Subject to MTRCB RATING

Regular showing on January 1, 2003 at the SM CINEMAS

DINA BONNEVIE FRANCINE PRIETO CHERRY PIE PICACHE
CHRISTIAN VAZQUEZ RODEL VELAYO
BOOTS ANSON ROA GINA PAREÑO
ALFRED VARGAS DOUGLAS ROBINSON JUANCHO VALENTINO

Bridal Shower

THEATRE MALL GREENHILLS

a landmark reinvented!

DOLBY DIGITAL SURROUND • EX

NOW SHOWING

CINEMA 1 MYSTIC RIVER 12:10, 3:00, 5:50, 8:40 R13

CINEMA 2 LOST ISLAND 11:25, 1:45, 4:05, 6:25, 8:50 R18

TICKET PRICES & SCREENING TIME SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE.
GREENHILLS SHOPPING CENTER, ORTIGAS AVENUE, GREENHILLS, SAN JUAN, METRO MANILA • 7224496

MUSIC MUSEUM | JAN 9.2004 | *KYLA RECALL | 8:30 PM
FOR INQUIRIES & RESERVATION, PLS. CALL 721-6726 OR 721-0636.

POWER PLANT CINEMA

Rockwell Center, Makati City ☎ Tel. No: 8981440-41

DOLBY DIGITAL SURROUND • EX

MYSTIC RIVER R13 1:25, 4:05, 6:45	ELF GP 1:25, 3:25, 5:25, 7:25	RUGRATS GO WILD GP 12:20, 2:10, 4:00, 5:50, 7:40
LORD OF THE RINGS 2 "TWO TOWERS" GP 2.30, 6:00	LOST ISLAND R18 12:50, 3.00, 5:10, 7:20	INTOLERABLE CRUELTY PG13 1:00, 3:05, 5:10, 7:15

MATINEE P80.00 - FREE SEATING - SCREENINGS BEFORE 5 PM - MON. TO FRI.

Mark Bautista's edge

From page A25

achievement? "That I'm still here." Her advice to young people who want to step into her shoes? "Don't pay any attention to what anyone says!"

Well, it's worked for her!

Feedback

FROM **Allan G. Tesoro** of Makati City: "Your article on **Fernando Poe Jr.** and his presidential ambitions was balanced, but the problem is, no matter how well-intentioned FPJ is, he may not even know that he is being manipulated by others for their own ends.

"These people are very good at what they do—or, better still, very good at *hiding* what they do—so, political neophytes may not be able to see through their ploys. Where would that leave FPJ—and us?"

The Chimp!

CARTOON Network goes bananas in January as it celebrates the Chinese New Year's Year of the Monkey. Catch some cool shows starring our simian friends, including "The Powerpuff Girls" (Mojo Jojo), "Dexter's Laboratory" (Dial M for Monkey), "Codename: Kids Next Door," "Johnny Bravo" and "Justice League."

The special episodes will be telecast on Jan. 22 and 23, from 6:30 a.m. to 8 a.m., and from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Merry memories...

From page A23

Christmas you spent in Hong Kong when you were a teenager, with all your brothers and sisters and "Nich" and "Lala," that you loved to tell everybody about (Christmas is also the wedding anniversary of Nich and Lala). You saw a gold chain bracelet you liked, so early Christmas morning you "kidnapped" Nich to buy it for you and promised not to tell your sisters so they wouldn't get envious.

You gave away Christmas gifts till February, never mind if it drained your bank account. You warned friends about recycling gifts because your brother-in-law gave away a pricey pen but the recipient returned it and said, "I think you gave me the wrong gift because this pen has your name engraved on it."

You even gave Ricky, Clara, my kids and me a taste of white Christmas in Korea and New York.

Even if you are not physically present, you still have given me a Christmas gift. And that's the stillness I feel in my heart when I talk to you in a way that only mothers and daughters can.

Merry, merry Christmas, Ma! No doubt you are celebrating the Lord's birthday with Him.

Saranghameda,

Your Taxina.

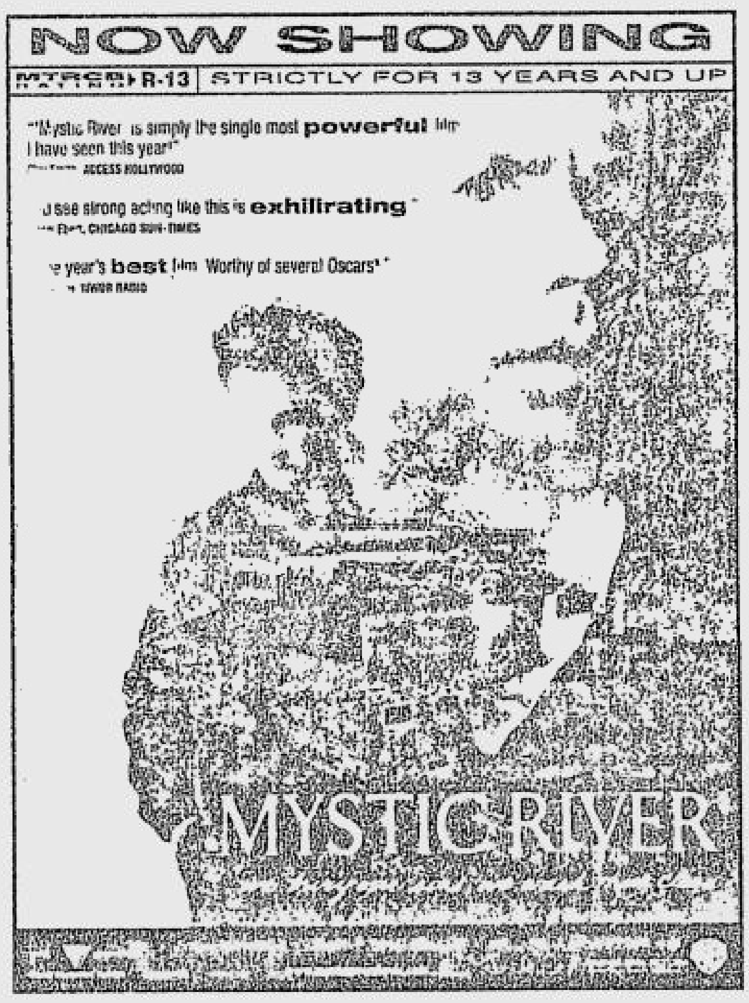
For feedback, e-mail friends_elpueblo@yahoo.com

Stargazing at Glorietta 1 Cinemas
featuring the cast of
FANTASTIC MAN
Hear THOR sing the theme song of Fantastic Man
Have your picture taken & signed by the stars! Plus win exciting prizes!
December 26 (Friday) 2003
5:00 PM
GLORIETTA 1 CINEMA LOBBY
[illegible] AT AYALA CINEMAS
VIC SOTTO
FANTASTIC MAN
DOLBY

Stargazing at Glorietta 1 Cinemas
featuring RICA PERALEJO of
MALIKMATA
HANDA KA NA BANG MATAKOT?
Have your picture taken & signed by Rica!
Hear MAEGAN AGUILAR sing the theme song of Malikmata! Plus win exciting prizes!
DECEMBER 26 (Friday) 3:00 PM
GLORIETTA 1 CINEMA LOBBY
MALIKMATA OPENS DECEMBER 25
AT AYALA CINEMAS
AYALA CINEMAS
Distributed by OctoArts Films
Canary Films Presentation
DOLBY

THEATER MOVIE GUIDE

MANILA	
EASTERN	
MAXIM	CLOSED
MIRAMAR	SEX BOMB / RAMPADORA
ODEON	X-MEN 2
ODEON-2	BUKID AY BASA / KASIBULAN
ROBEN	BOLD STAR
TANDEM-1	SUGAT
TANDEM-2	KATAWAN MO LANGIT KO
TIMES	SPY LEGEND OF [illegible]
QUEZON CITY	
ACT-1	SENSUAL ISLAND
ACT-2	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
ACT-3	ORIGINAL SIN
ACT-4	HANGGANG KAILAN KA PAPATAY
CORONET A	ALIPIN
CORONET B	A MAN APART
QUEZON-1	BERTUD NG PUTIK
REMAR	X-MEN 2
REMAR-2	BOLD STAR
NOVA MALL - NOVALICHES CINEMA	
A	LIBERATED
B	AKO, IKAW, SIYA
C	
MANDALUYONG CITY	
SHANGRI-LA PLAZA MALL	635-20-79 / 633-78-51 TO 70
CINEMA-1	CLOSED FOR RENOVATION
CINEMA-2	CLOSED FOR RENOVATION
CAINTA RIZAL	
STA. LUCIA EAST	(681-5401 TO 19)
CINEMA-1	BIKTIMA
CINEMA-2	ALIPIN
CINEMA-3	WAG KANG KIKIBO
CINEMA-4 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	MR. SUAVE
CINEMA-5 (DTS)	LORD OF THE RINGS
CINEMA-6	CHAVIT
CINEMA-7	BABAE SA BREAKWATER
CINEMA-8	ASBOOBS
CINEMA-9 (DTS)	LOST ISLAND
CINEMA-10 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	LORDS OF THE RINGS 2
CINEMA-11 (SDDS)	STAR RUNNER
CINEMA-12	CABIN FEVER
CINEMA-14	JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
CINEMA-15	ELF
LORES	
CINEMA-2	SENSUAL ISLAND
CINEMA-3	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
NE CINEMAGIC - CABANATUAN	
(LAS PINAS)	OUT OF TIME
CINEMA-1	JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
CINEMA-2	FIGHTING TEMPTATIONS
CINEMA-4	COLD CREEK MANOR
UNIWIDE COASTAL MALL	
(PARANAQUE)	SENSUAL ISLAND
CINEMA-1	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
CINEMA-2	MEN IN BLACK II
CINEMA-4	SELDA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1	THE GRUDGE	MYSTIC RIVER	ArtFilm BALZAC 12 20, 2 30, 4 40, 6 50, 9 00	THX GUARANTEED SEATS ELF 2 50 5 00 7 10 9 20 11 30	THX INTOLERABLE CRUELTY
2	LOST ISLAND	THE GRUDGE	JEEPERS CREEPERS 2 1 30, 3 30 5 30 7 30 9 30	THX GUARANTEED SEATS INTOLERBALE CRUELTY 2 30 4 45 7 00 9 15 11 10	MYSTIC RIVER
3	CABIN FEVER	THX GUARANTEED SEATS INTOLERABLE CRUELTY 1 30 3 45 6 00 8 15 10 30	Onstage REGINE VELASQUEZ Dec. 19 & 20 - 9pm	GUARANTEED SEATS LORD OF THE RINGS 2 12 45, 4 00, 7 15, 10 30	ELF
4	OUT OF TIME	PIRATES OF THE CARRIBEAN		GUARANTEED SEATS SCARY MOVIE 3 1 30 3 30 5 30 7 30 9 30	UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN
5		MYSTIC RIVER		GUARANTEED SEATS MYSTIC RIVER 3 00 5 50 8 40 11 30	JEEPERS CREEPERS 2
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Mark Bautista's edge

VIEWFINDER

Nestor U. Torre

NOW that Viva Entertainment has successfully launched the multimedia career of teen star **Sarah Geronimo**, it's trying to do the same for **Mark Bautista**, Sarah's co-finalist in the "Star for a Night" singing competition last year.

Why Mark, rather than another male finalist, or any of the talented young men who present themselves to the Viva bosses for their consideration?

Mark's edge is his combination of strong singing voice and boyish good looks. This unique combination of attributes has prompted Viva to bet on the new talent's stellar potential, not just as a singer, but also as an actor.

He's currently busy recording songs for his debut album, which will be released early next year. And he's also in the **Jolina Magdangal** starrer, "Annie B.," where he's paired with Sarah.

His incipient success is particularly sweet for Mark, because he had to strive extra hard to make use of the break that "Star for a Night" gave him. When he was told that he had to travel from the province to Manila for his final audition, he was stumped because he didn't even have enough money to buy a boat ticket!

Solution: He and his brother begged to "hitch" a boat ride to Manila for a much smaller amount—and the rest is, as they say, pop history.

Another saying goes: To whom much is given, much is expected. But, for people like Mark who don't have much in terms of financial resources to begin with but do everything needed to make it, even greater success can be expected to come to them as their reward, and for them to sweetly savor.

Cher spoofs self

IN THE **Farrelly** brothers' latest film, "Stuck on You," the legendary **Cher** gamely spoofs herself. The comedy is about a pair of conjoined twins (**Matt Damon** and **Greg Kinnear**) who go to Hollywood in search of stardom—and find themselves having to contend with an iconic diva who's also an Oscar awardee (Cher). The Hollywood star's character was written so broadly that Cher made it an exaggerated version of herself, complete with the cliches attached to her screen image, like the rumor that she likes dating much younger men.

The film sends up this particular favorite of gossip-mongers in a scene that shows Cher in bed with a half-naked **Frankie Muniz**! The scene gets the biggest laughs of all.

Another rumor is that Cher is a has-been, but that's quickly debunked by the concerts she does, which pull in 20,000 people each time.

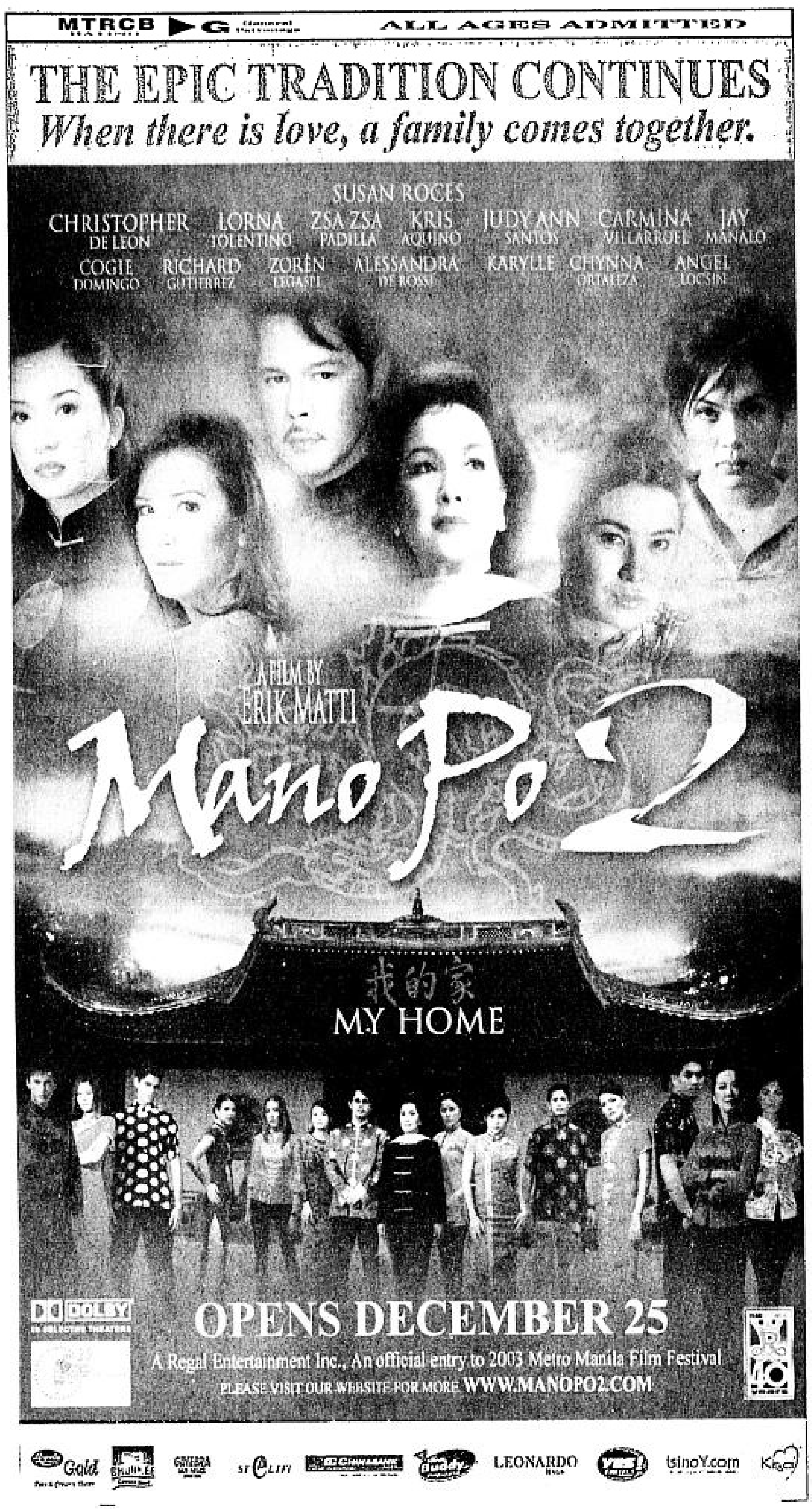
Still, at 57, Cher has decided to conclude her career on the live performance scene. She's planning her farewell concert tour. Her logic: "At some point, you have to stop—and it's better to do it when you're still doing a really good job, like I am now."

Cher isn't afraid of retirement, because it'll give her time to do so many other things: "First, there's this movie I want to direct—and another movie titled 'In the Pink'—and I'd love to sing old standards at Carnegie Hall!" What she won't do is write her memoirs—at least, "not until everybody's dead!"

Nor is she interested in looking back on her long-running career, spanning 20 films and over 30 albums! But she does admit to having a favorite song. It's "Believe," which she sings at the end of her shows.

Her greatest

MARK/ A24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When there is love, a family comes together.
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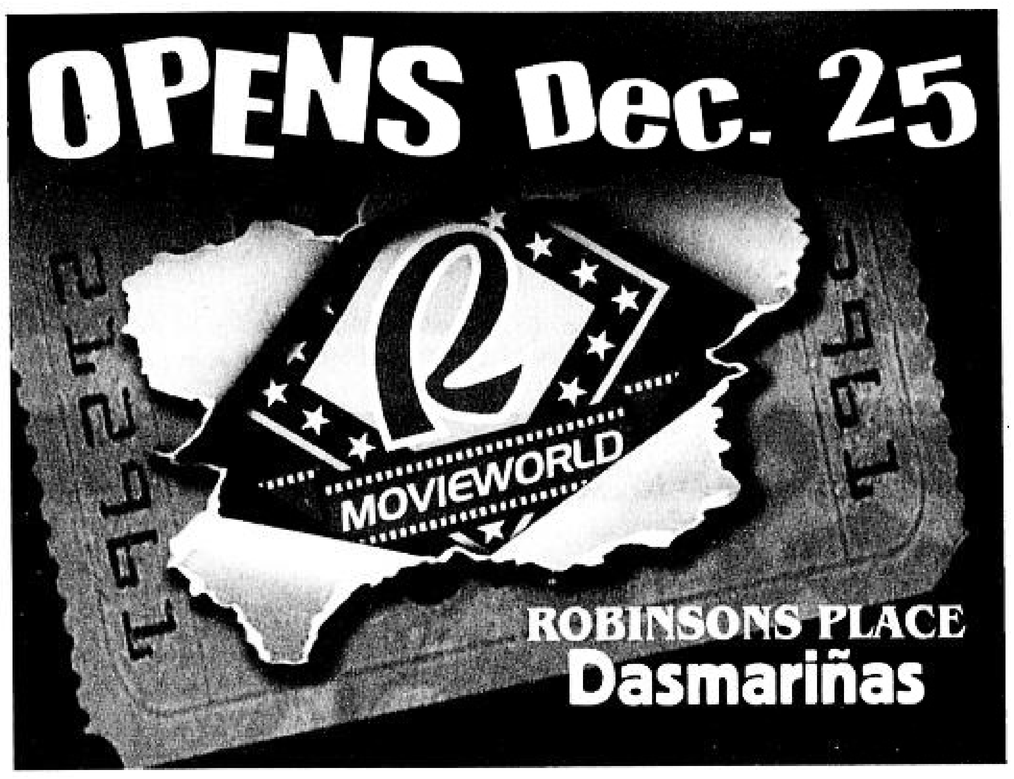
HANDA KA NA BANG MATAKOT ?
THE MOST HORRIFYING FILM OF 2003
MTRCB RATING ▶ PG-13 Parental Guidance 13 - (Children below thirteen (13) years of age shall be allowed only if accompanied by a parent or an adult.)
This movie contains scary scenes that may not be suitable for very young viewers. parental guidance is proposed
MARVIN AGUSTIN DINGDONG DANTES
RICKY DAVAO WOWIE DE GUZMAN ANNA CAPRI NIKKI VALDEZ AND MS. BARBARA PEREZ
RICA PERALEJO
MALIKMATA
HANDA KA NA BANG MATAKOT?
STARRING SHINTARO VALDEZ EUGENE DOMINGO JACKIE CASTILLEJO MADELEINE NICOLAS
DIRECTED BY JOSE JAVIER REYES dgpi
OFFICIAL ENTRY TO THE METRO MANILA FILM FESTIVAL 2003
ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK FROM OCTOARTS - ORBIT MUSIC
CANARY FILMS PRESENTATION DOLBY IN SELECTED THEATRES Distributed by: OctoArts FILMS
OPENS DECEMBER 25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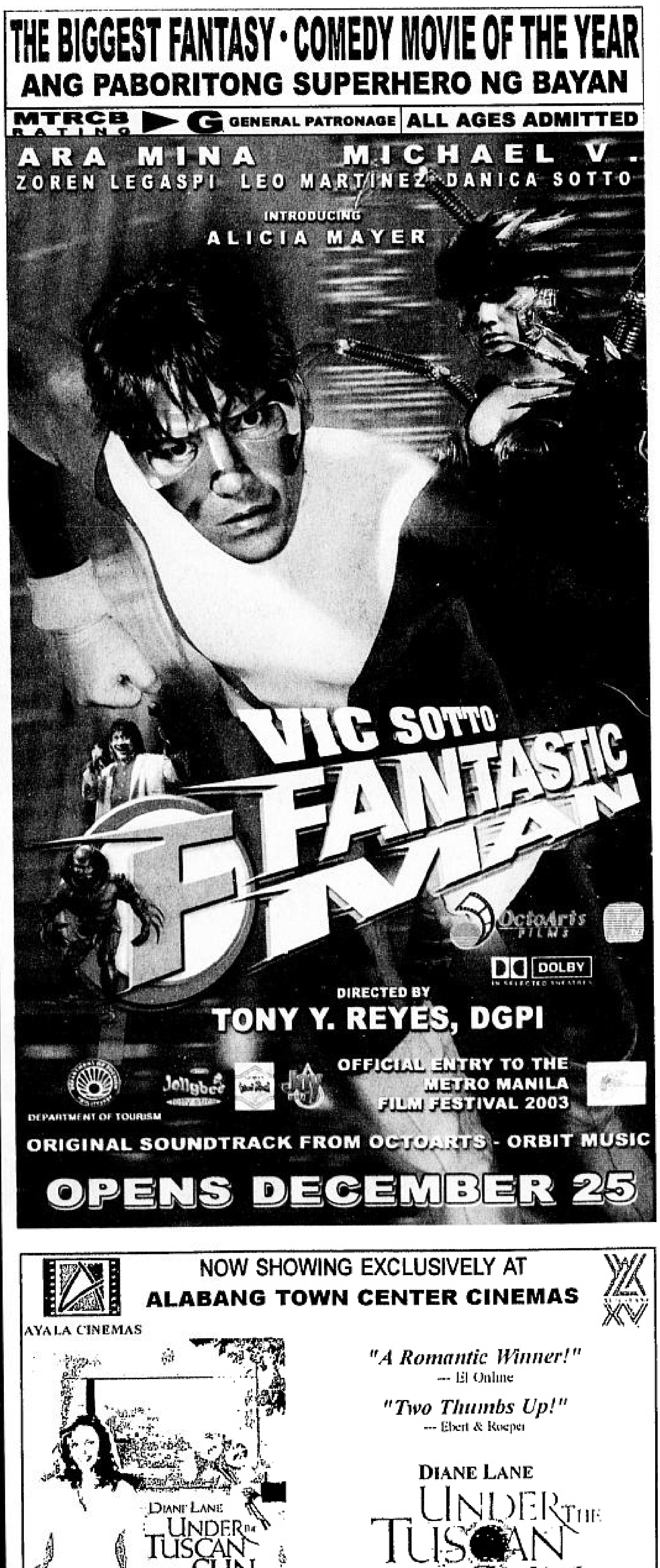
THE BIGGEST FANTASY · COMEDY MOVIE OF THE YEAR
ANG PABORITONG SUPERHERO NG BAYAN
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ARA MINA MICHAEL V.
ZOREN LEGASPI LEO MARTINEZ DANICA SOTTO
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VIC SOTTO
FANTASTIC MAN
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DOLBY
DIRECTED BY TONY Y. REYES, DGPI
DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM Jollibee
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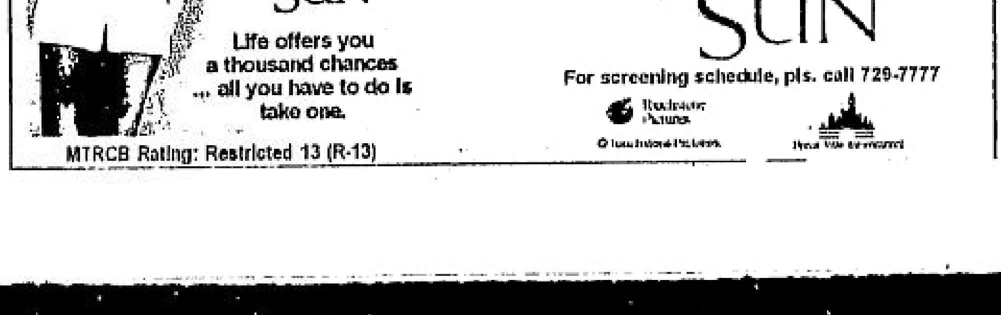
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ENTERTAINMENT

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Editor **Louie C. Camino**

F4's Dec. 26 show to go on after all

THE SHOW goes on!

The one-night Manila concert of the complete Taiwanese boy band F4 will happen on Dec. 26 after all, but in another venue.

The "F4 Live Happy New Year Concert 2004" will now be held at the Philsports Arena (formerly Ultra) in Pasig and not at the Fort open field in Taguig as earlier reported, said the show's Taiwanese producer, Lawrence Lo of DaiBei Production Inc.

Boy Abunda's Backroom Inc. and Susan Lim of Big Slim Entertainment will handle the promotion, Lo said.

East West Global Entertainment last Saturday backed out as co-producer saying Lo failed to come up with the money to finance the show. *Marinel R. Cruz*

THEY'RE COMING to Manila again.

Merry memories of Christmases with Ma

DOLLY WOOD

Dolly Ann Carvajal

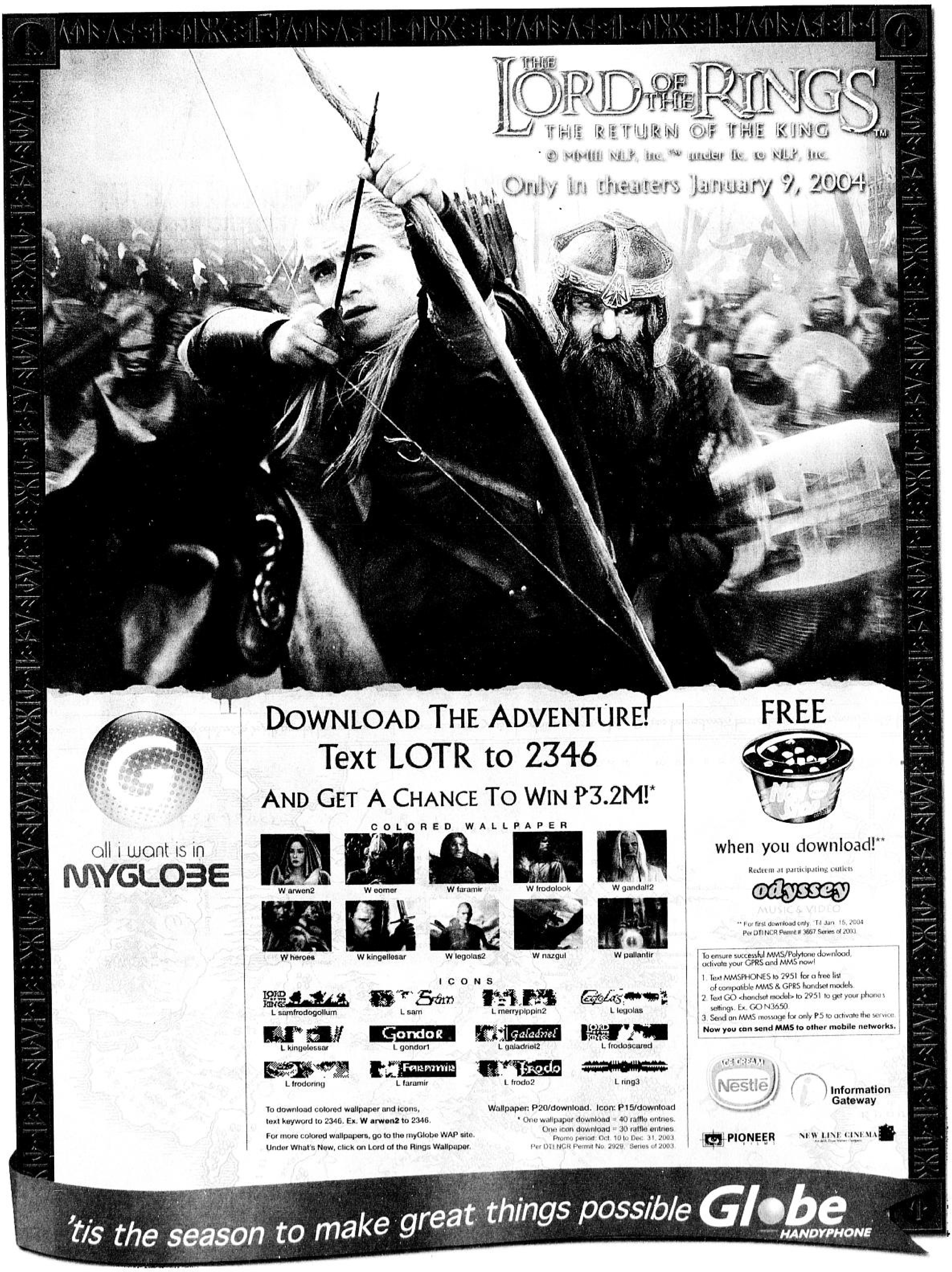
IT'S my very first Christmas without my mom. I'll never get used to missing her especially during the holiday season.

Here's to you Ma! Christmas can never be complete without "ma."

Dearest Mommy,

You have always been everybody's Santa Badiday. Over and above the gifts you so generously gave away, whether it's Christmas or not, the gift of time stands out. You loved to have long talks with your "loyalists" and closest friends while feasting on ham and *quezo de bola*. Who wouldn't miss the riotous parties you used to throw for your production staff and for your supporters, and the *sisid regalo at our Abada swimming pool? Who would forget the wacky skits and costumes your staff put together*

MERRY/A23



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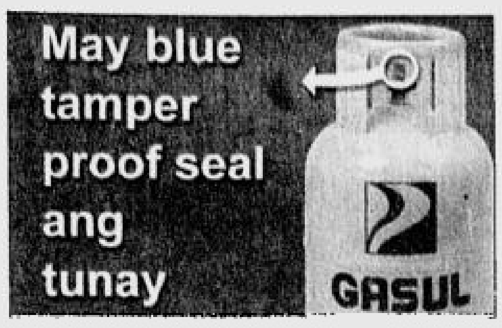

TUESDAY,
DECEMBER 23, 2003

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

BUSINESS

B1

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Politics seen stalling investment flow in '04

By Michelle V. Remo

THE COUNTRY may not be able to attract new investments nor generate additional jobs at least until the third quarter of next year due to the perceived volatility of the local investment climate brought by the run-up to the May elections.

This was the forecast made by businessman and consumer advocate Raul Concepcion, who added that the economy might post flat growth next year because the government may settle down from the election fever only after newly elected officials shall have taken some time to adapt to their posts.

He said the country's gross domestic product growth may reach 4 to 4.5 percent next year, or the same with the government's GDP growth forecast for this year.

"The country should have economic and business policies that are comparative with the rest of the Asian region in order to attract investments," he said, adding preparations for the coming elections currently shifted focus away from tailor-fitting current policies to the needs of the economy.

While no improvement in the economy is seen next year, Concepcion said he did not foresee any worse scenario to happen because the new administration would likely give full attention to moving the economy forward.

He said the projected GDP growth for this year would be maintained next year partly because of election spending. He also said no significant amount of job losses could be expected in 2004.

"At the end of the day, we can be optimistic because what goes down has to go up," he said, saying the next President was expected to make tough decisions that have not been done before in pursuit of unifying the nation and developing the economy.

He said it was indispensable that the next President to firmly initiate economic and governance reforms. "If you don't do it in the next six years, it will be very difficult for the country to catch up with the rest in Asia," he said in a briefing yesterday.

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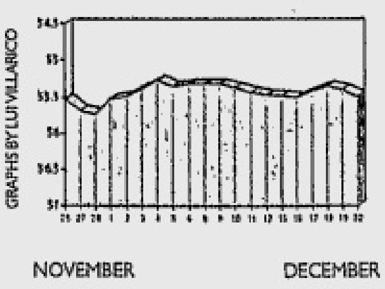

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₱ 55.5= $1

As of 5 p.m., Dec. 22, 2003

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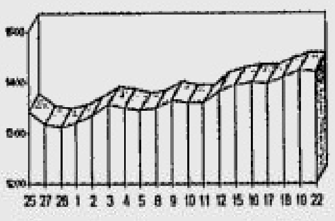
As of 5 p.m., Dec. 22, 2003

GOLD: $408.20-408.70
per ounce Hong Kong, Dec. 22, 2003

STOCK MARKET

Stocks end lower

PSE COMPOSITE INDEX



(See stock market report on Page B2)

STOCKS edged lower yesterday as mild profit-taking hit select large caps led by leading conglomerate Ayala Corp. after the market hit a six-week high in the previous session.

The Philippine main index dipped 1.21 points or 0.09 percent to 1,421.03 points. The market is up 39.53 percent so far this year.

"I think window-dressing is beginning to wane. Now there is mild profit-taking in select blue chips," said AB Capital economic analyst Jose Vistan.

Turnover rose 55 percent to P681.6 million from Friday's P439.3 million.

RCBC Securities stock analyst Chelsea Dipasupil said in a report she still expected share prices to inch up in the near term as players adjust positions ahead of the new year.

Reuters

Economic officials say growth on track

By Clarissa S. Batino

THE MACAPAGAL administration yesterday announced that it had exceeded most economic targets this year and was well on track to achieving even more challenging growth and fiscal objectives in 2004 despite the prevailing political pressures that have proven inimical to economic expansion.

Election spending of about P30 billion next year should boost economic growth, according to the economic managers.

They denied that the country was suffering from a fiscal crisis as the debt profile remained manageable while efforts were being made to bring down the budget deficit to zero over time.

Pronouncements from former Finance Secretary Jose Isidro Camacho that the country was in a fiscal crisis had weakened the peso by about 50 centavos, according to the central bank.

"Unfortunately, we won't end the year at the 54.95 (to a dollar) that we are looking at. We will probably end the year closer to where we are now at 55.50. We paid an additional 50 centavos on pronouncements that we are in a crisis," said Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Governor Rafael Buenaventura.

Economic Planning Secretary Romulo Neri said that gross domestic product would grow by at least 4.2 percent this year or well within the low-end of the target while Finance Secretary Juanita Amatong said the budget deficit would likely end the year at about P200 billion or lower than the P202-billion ceiling.

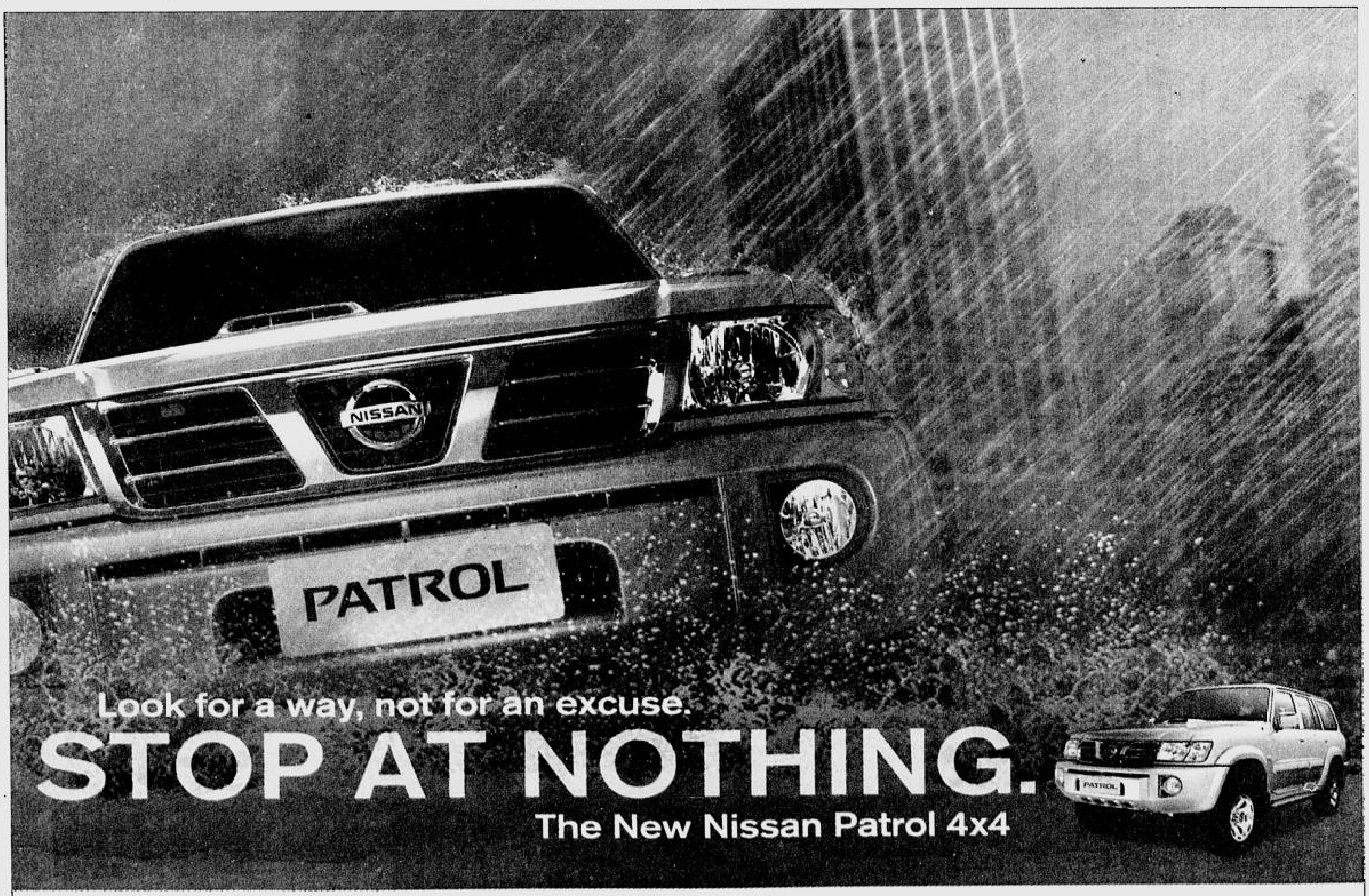
Buenaventura said inflation would likely average at 3.1 percent against a program range of 4.5-5.5 percent.

Of the important indicators, only exports performed below the target with receipts expected to post a growth of only 2 percent against a target of 5-8 percent.

But strong inflow from overseas Filipino workers and higher foreign borrowing have offset the slowdown in exports, according to the BSP chief. This year, the government also kept the benchmark 91-day treasury bill rate at about 6 percent against a program of 8-9 percent.

Budget Undersecretary Laura

ECONOMIC/ B3



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My wish for 2004

MR. BEARBULL

Ron Nathan

A TOUGH Mafia boss called his house and told the maid to put his wife on the phone. "I'm sorry sir, but she is busy at the moment." The Mafia boss was furious. "Put her on now, I don't care what she is doing."

"I can't, sir, she is taking a bath."

"Well, get her out of the bath pronto or you are fired."

"Sir, I can't interrupt her. She is with another man."

The Mafia boss yelled at the maid, "Get the gun in the study and shoot them both in the head. Do it now."

"I can't," sobbed the maid. "I can't shoot them."

"Well, in that case, I am coming home and I will kill the three of you. If you don't want to die, shoot them now."

The maid left the telephone and about 20 seconds later, there were 2 shots. The maid returned and said tearfully, "I have done it, sir."

"Good. Now throw the gun into the swimming pool."

"But sir, we don't have a swimming pool."

"Sorry, I must have called the wrong house."

* * *

IF you are wondering what to buy your relatives for Christmas this year, why not indulge them with a high-tech flatulence filter seat cushion. When your guest suffers from uncontrollable outbursts of intestinal gas as a result of overeating turkey or *lechon*, the cushion will muffle the sound and absorb the odor. They come in a range of designs and colors, and are obtainable from gasbgon.com for only $21.95. Replacement carbon filters are also available. What a wonderful technically advanced age we live in.

Here is another interesting piece of trivia. If you type "miserable failure" into GOOGLE's search engine, you will be linked to the official biography of President Bush. Nobody is quite sure how it happened, but it is probably the handiwork of Saddam Hussein.

I love the way children think things out logically even though this often leads to the wrong conclusion. My daughter asked me if God was male or female. Not wishing to show discrimination, I replied both. Then she asked if God was black or white, and I again replied both. After a few minutes of deep concentration, she asked, "Is Michael Jackson, God?"

* * *

THIS is your last chance to subscribe at the old rate before I have to pay for a trader.

Window dressing started a little earlier than usual and, as expected, the prime movers are TEL and GLOBE, both at new peaks for the year. It has been a good year for the market though the public has not participated in it, judging by the net turnover minus foreign activity. This is a pity because the Phisix has risen 40 percent this year, but a deeper analysis shows that most leaders rose 20 percent while third liners failed to participate at all.

The outright winners were my two recommendations. TEL has almost quadrupled while GLOBE has more than doubled. I think they will go higher still in 2004 but obviously not at the same pace. Both companies feel that saturation will not be reached for another two years and GLOBE's P25 pre-paid card is meant to attract teenagers and those in the provinces.

Apart from these two companies that will announce tripled profits and doubled profits, most other leaders did fairly well. SMPH, ALI, AC all grew at single digits which is steady but unexciting. ABSP had a sensational recovery, thanks to the success of Meteor Garden and FPH produced excellent third quarter profits from doubled sales. MERALCO continues to be beset by problems, but this is discounted to some extent by the fall in the share price. When GMA came to power, MERB was P86 and prior to that, it had been P158.

The banks did not have a great year, but they managed to reduce their bad debts a little and they increased loans in every month. Property shares are going to be affected by the increase in the 91-day Treasury bill rate to 7.5 percent-8.5 percent, about 2 percent higher than at present. Since this is the benchmark for borrowing, it means that mortgages will become dearer.

Companies with large local debt will have to pay considerably more in interest because rates this year have been at a historically low level. Unfortunately, most Filipino companies fall into this category. The only consolation for depositors is that Banks should be able to pay higher rates, at least equal to the projected inflation rate of 4 percent-5 percent, after tax. The government will have to pay more next year for their treasury bills and bonds, and this will make it even harder to control the budget deficit as the percentage required to fund it will rise. This is why the government has been so eager to fund most of next year's debt well in advance.

The political situation remains unresolved between the two presidential wannabes in the LDP with neither willing to give way to the other. To add to the confusion, we now hear that Brother Eddie is going to run, and if this is true, it will be a bitter blow for President Macapagal as she was counting on his votes. We still have not heard from Sen. Noli de Castro, and before Jan. 5, I anticipate that Brother Mike, Brother Manalo, the Dalai Lama, the Ayatolla, and the Chief Rabbi will also join in. I am even considering running myself, and I know that I can count on all readers of my column to support me, both of them.

In the United States, the DOW broke through the 10,000 level for the first time in 18 months. December is usually a good month and so it has been proven this year, with the DOW at a 19-month high. Profits and productivity are up and the figures announced last week showed that even the labor market is improving. The number of new unemployment claims fell by 23,000 in one week.

The US budget deficit of $41.8 billion in November alone, equivalent to $500 billion a year makes our $4 billion look insignificant, but it is the ratio of debt to GDP that counts. The dollar remains weak and the euro hit a high of 1.24. I remember when it was 0.85. The Australian dollar has also done extremely well, rising from 0.52 to 0.77. Even the pound has recovered from 1.40 to 1.76, much to my delight.

With the capture of Saddam Hussein and the formation of an Iraqi government by June, I am optimistic that next year will also be a good one. Hopefully, the US and the EU can mend their difference and there will be some progress on the Israeli/Palestinian problem. We have to learn to live with each other in peace, and it is my greatest wish that the spirit of goodwill, which exists at Christmas, be made more permanent in the hearts of all men.

Starting Dec. 31, I will take my first holiday in 7 years. I wanted to go to Russia but my wife is afraid of Czars. Newsletters will resume on Jan 5. Eat, drink and be merry but watch your cholesterol. *mrbearbull@hotmail.com.*

PLDT to use Smart IPO fund to reduce debts

By Abigail L. Ho

THE INITIAL public offering of cellular giant Smart Communications Inc. will raise some $600 million, which parent firm, Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co., will use to pay its debts.

PLDT president and chief executive Manuel V. Pangilinan said in an interview that the money the company would collect from the listing of Smart in the local bourse would be used to trim debts to a more manageable level.

"If we float around 30 percent of Smart, it will raise at least $600 million. We will use this to pare down debts to a more sustainable and agreeable level on the fixed line side," he told reporters.

A sustainable and agreeable level for him meant a total debt load on the fixed line side of below $2 billion.

Right now, PLDT is still trying to hurdle around $2.4 billion in debts, all from its land line business. Smart only has around $300 million in debts.

Pangilinan said PLDT's fixed line business could only post earnings in 2004 or 2005, with an earnings kick seen to happen only in 2006.

"By the end of 2005, (debts) should be down to below $2 billion, hopefully around $1.7 billion to $1.8 billion. That's the agreeable level for fixed. At that level, fixed line's interest expense should drop significantly. So the impact on our (profit and loss statement) in 2006 should be significantly beneficial," he said.

Industry observers have expressed apprehension that with Smart shares listed in the Philippine Stock Exchange, PLDT's current investors may unload their PLDT shares and opt to buy Smart shares instead.

While Pangilinan admitted that this was one of PLDT management's considerations in preparing for Smart's listing, he said this was not seen as a huge threat to the attractiveness of PLDT's shares in the market.

FORMER Trade Secretary Mar Roxas and Director General Lilia de Lima of Peza, received the special Partners of ATP award from Mike Petrucci, president of Amkor Technology Philippines Inc. during the company's Christmas Party held at the Ultra last Dec. 14.

SPI starts buying back shares

LEADING IT service provider SPI Technologies, which failed to close an $84-million buy-in deal with a unit of UK-based insurance giant Prudential Plc., has started buying back shares in the stock market.

In a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange yesterday, SPI said it had bought 171,000 shares at an average price of P12.99 each on Friday, accounting for more than half of the volume of 339,000 shares that day.

Yesterday, some 895,000 SPI shares changed hands at the stock exchange.

The start of the buyback program allowed SPI shares, which had sharply dropped last week even prior to the announcement that the entry of PPM Ventures Ltd. would not push through, to firm up at the same P13 closing price on Friday.

This is part of a share repurchase program approved by SPI's board on Friday, in a bid to cushion the fall in the company's share price after the aborted deal.

Companies with sufficient retained earnings usually resort to a share buyback to defend its share price when they believe the same was undervalued by the market.

SPI announced on Friday that its board of directors had approved a share buyback budget of P55 million, the same day it disclosed that it had walked out of a deal that would have divested a controlling stake in favor of PPMV.

The exclusivity period given by the Prudential unit to allow the conduct of due diligence and other activities had lapsed "with the parties not reaching agreement on the principal terms and conditions of said offer."

Investors earlier sold down SPI shares because the aborted deal would mean that there would no longer be a tender offer by PPMV.

PPVM is a leading source of private equity finance with some two billion euros under its investment portfolio. It specializes in medium and large buyouts and institutional purchases. *Doris C. Dumlao*

Fil-Estate settles ₱482-M loan

By Doris C. Dumlao

PROPERTY developer Fil-Estate Land Inc. has reduced its debts by P482 million with the settlement of its obligation to Union Bank of the Philippines.

FEL disclosed to the Philippine Stock Exchange yesterday that the loan, which was part of the company's P919 million in outstanding bank loans as of end-September this year, had been repaid in full.

Amid the continuing slump in the real estate sector, FEL said it was continuing to revisit its strategies and implement measures to generate liquidity.

Among these is the reduction of bank debts and payables to suppliers, contractors and other creditors through "dacion en pago" or debt-for-asset swap arrangements.

Aside from bank loans, FEL is saddled with P4.1 billion in other accounts payable and accrued expenses as of end-September.

During the nine-month period, revenues declined by 19 percent to P907 million from a year ago due to a 15-percent drop in sales.

Its current revenue drivers are still its residential projects, particularly the Goldridge Estate and Plaridel Heights in Bulacan, Queensborough in Pampanga and Forest Hills in Antipolo.

Aside from debt reduction measures, FEL aims to boost its cash flows by forging alliances with strategic partners and investors for the completion of various developments; negotiating the sale of land held for future development in order to generate liquidity; regularly reviewing development costs and matching the pace of development with fund availability as well as closely monitoring land prices and lot cuts; conducting intensive collection campaign to improve collections; launching of subdivision projects catering to the middle income market, and aggressive marketing of golf course construction and maintenance services.

Insular Life names Ongsingco president

INSULAR Life executive vice president and chief operating officer Mayo Jose B. Ongsingco has been promoted to president effective Jan. 1. Insular chair Vicente R. Aylion will remain as chair and chief executive officer.

Ayllon has been both chair and president of the country's leading Filipino life insurance company since 1977.

Ongsingco has been Insular Life's EVP, COO and chief financial and investment officer since August 2002 in a concurrent capacity. Prior to that, he was president of Insular subsidiaries I-Care and Insular Investment and Trust Corp. where he is a board director. He is also vice chair of Insular Savings Bank and director of other Insular Life subsidiaries and affiliates such as Pilipinas Shell Petroleum, Insular Life Foundation and Insular Life Property Holdings.

PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE

(As of December 22, 2003)

STOCKS	OPEN	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE	VOLUME
BANKS & FINANCIAL SERVICES					
BANKS					
Banco de Oro Univ. Bank	17	17	17	17	52,000
Bank of the Phil. Islands	46	46	45.5	46	243,000
Citystate Savings Bank	15.75	15.75	15.75	15.75	2,800
Equitable PCI Bank Inc.	34	34	34	34	230,400
Export and Ind. Bank Inc.	0.54	0.55	0.54	0.55	670,000
Metropolitan Bank & Trust	26.5	26.5	26	26	81,300
Philippine National Bank	24.75	24.75	24.25	24.25	20,600
Security Bank Corp.	16	16	16	16	2,000
FINANCIAL SERVICES					
First Abacus Financial	0.34	0.38	0.34	0.38	1,410,000
Phil. Stock Exchange Inc.	230	230	230	230	30
Sun Life Financial Inc.	1305	1305	1305	1305	3,130
COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL					
COMMUNICATION					
ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp.	25	25.5	25	25.5	5,300
Digital Telecom Phils Inc.	0.68	0.68	0.68	0.68	10,000
Globe Telecom Inc.	840	845	840	845	6,140
ISM Communications Corp.	0.04	0.04	0.039	0.04	1,300,000
Pilipino Tel. Corp.	0.9	0.9	0.89	0.9	4,800,000
Phil. Long Dis Tel Co.	935	945	930	940	103,040
Philweb Corp.	0.011	0.011	0.01	0.011	20,700,000
POWER & ENERGY					
Manila Electric Co. A	14.75	14.75	14.75	14.75	13,400
Manila Electric Co. B	24	24	23.75	24	2,472,500
Petron Corp.	2.22	2.24	2.22	2.24	1,826,000
Salcon Power Corp.	2.04	2.04	2.04	2.04	50,000
Trans-Asia Oil and Energy	0.93	0.95	0.93	0.95	450,000
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES					
Int'l Container Term'l Sv	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.3	210,000
Keppel Phils. Marine Inc.	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.26	210,000
CONSTRUCTION & OTHER RELATED PRODUCTS					
Engineering Equip. Inc.	0.35	0.35	0.35	0.35	80,000
FOOD, BEVERAGES & TOBACCO					
Ginebra San Miguel Inc.	31	31.5	31	31.5	35,000
Jollibee Foods Corp.	17.25	17.5	17.25	17.5	495,600
RFM Corp.	0.67	0.67	0.67	0.67	40,000
San Miguel Corp. A	53.5	54	53.5	54	7,600
San Miguel Corp. B	63	63.5	62.5	63.5	34,200
Vitarich Corp.	0.27	0.27	0.26	0.27	400,000
HOLDING FIRMS					
Abacus Con Res & Hdg A	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	50,000
Ayala Corp.	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.2	2,370,000
Aboitiz Equity Ventures	3.15	3.15	3.1	3.1	112,000
A. Soriano Corp.	0.84	0.84	0.84	0.84	1,010,000
ATN Holdings Inc.	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	10,000
Baguio Gold Holdings Corp.	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.31	10,000
Bacnotan Cons Indus Inc.	10	10	10	10	17,000
Benpres Holdings Corp.	0.48	0.48	0.48	0.48	220,000
Southeast Asian Cement	0.047	0.05	0.047	0.05	3,300,000
DMCI Holdings Inc.	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.26	390,000
Filinvest Dev. Corp.	0.98	0.98	0.98	0.98	60,000
First Phil Hldgs Corp.	18.75	18.75	18.75	18.75	315,400
Global Equities Inc.	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	100,000
J.G. Summit Holdings Inc.	1.98	1.98	1.98	1.98	5,000
Megaworld Corp.	1.02	1.02	1.02	1.02	270,000
Metro Pacific Corp.	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28	690,000
Music Corp.	0.35	0.35	0.35	0.35	80,000
MANUFACTURING, DISTRIBUTION & TRADING					
Chemical Ind. Of The Phil	55	55	55	55	10,000
Matsushita Elec Phil Corp.	6.7	6.8	6.7	6.8	18,000
Pryce Corp.	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	300,000
SPI Technologies Inc.	13	13	13	13	895,400
HOTEL, RECREATION & OTHER SERVICES					
Belle Corp.	0.56	0.56	0.56	0.56	10,000
Mondragon Intl Phils Inc.	0.165	0.165	0.165	0.165	50,000
Premiere Ent. Prod. Inc.	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.27	50,000
BONDS, PREFERRED & WARRANTS					
ABS-CBN Hldgs. Corp. (Pdr)	25	25	25	25	28,400
PLDT (10% Pref) Series V	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	1,800
PLDT (10% Pref) Series W	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	1,100
PLDT 10% Pref Series Aa	10.5	10.5	10.5	10.5	2,100
Philweb Corp. - Warrants	0.0006	0.0006	0.0006	0.0006	28,000,000
WGA - Preferred	5.5	5.5	5.5	5.5	5,000
OTHERS					
Centro Escolar University	7	7.3	7	7.3	55,000
PROPERTY					
Ayala Land Inc.	6	6.1	6	6	29,825,000
Araneta Properties Inc.	0.22	0.22	0.22	0.22	100,000
Cityland Development Corp.	1.82	1.82	1.82	1.82	22,000
Cebu Holdings Inc.	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	140,000
C & P Homes Inc.	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.16	90,000
Cyber Bay Corp.	0.135	0.135	0.135	0.135	200,000
Empire East Land Inc.	0.21	0.21	0.21	0.21	700,000
Filinvest Land Inc.	1.02	1.02	1	1	7,420,000
Keppel Phils. Prop. Inc.	0.79	0.79	0.79	0.79	100,000
SM Development Corp.	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08	102,000
SM Prime Holdings Inc.	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.5	2,848,000
MINING					
Abra Mining & Industrial	0.0032	0.0032	0.0032	0.0032	2,000,000
Atlas Cons. Min & Dev't	0.96	0.96	0.96	0.96	100,000
Lepanto Cons. Mng. Co B	0.3	0.3	0.28	0.28	950,000
Manila Mining Corp. B	0.008	0.008	0.008	0.008	5,000,000
Omico Corp.	0.0032	0.0032	0.0032	0.0032	5,000,000
OIL					
Pacifica	0.0075	0.0075	0.0075	0.0075	2,000,000

	SHARES	VALUE(P)
Bank & Fin Svc	2,715,360	27,547,450.00
Comm'l & Ind'l	94,884,980	447,744,305.00
PRO	41,547,000	205,655,940.00
Mining	13,050,000	427,400.00
OIL	2,000,000	15,000.00
SME	30,000	67,000.00
GRAND TOTALS:	154,227,240	681,457,095.00

	AVERAGES	
Bank & Fin Svc	431.37	DOWN 2.13
Comm'l & Ind'l	2,150.28	UP 1.38
PRO	565.74	DOWN 1.27
Mining	1,598.37	DOWN 22.83
OIL	1.21	UNCH 0.00
SME	100.00	UNCH 0.00
All Shares Index	851.50	DOWN 1.20
Composite	1,421.03	DOWN 1.21

NO. OF ADVANCES: 17; NO. OF DECLINES: 27; NO. OF UNCHANGED: 37; NO. OF TRADED ISSUES: 81; NO. OF TRADES: 1,076

DISCLOSURES

CENTRAL Azucarera de Tarlac Inc. will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on Jan. 27, 11 a.m. at the Alto Pavilion, San Miguel, Tarlac City. Stockholders of record as of Jan. 20 will be entitled to vote at the meeting.

***

TERESITA Ilagan and Carolina Diaz were appointed controller and senior consultant, respectively, of **Victorias Milling Company Inc.**

***

TRANSPACIFIC Broadcast Group International Inc. changed its name to Transpacific Broadband Group International Inc.

***

SPI Technologies Inc. bought 171,000 of its own shares at an average price of P12.9912 each.

***

THE PHILIPPINE Stock Exchange disclosed the resignation of Imelda Nibungco as vice president for human resource and management department.

***

JOHNNY Araneta, **Insular Life Assurance Company Inc.**'s nominee director in Union Bank of the Philippines, resigned from the board of the bank after reaching the mandatory retirement of 15 years with Insular Life.

***

FIL-Estate Land Inc. reached a full settlement agreement of its P482 million obligation with Union Bank of the Philippines.

***

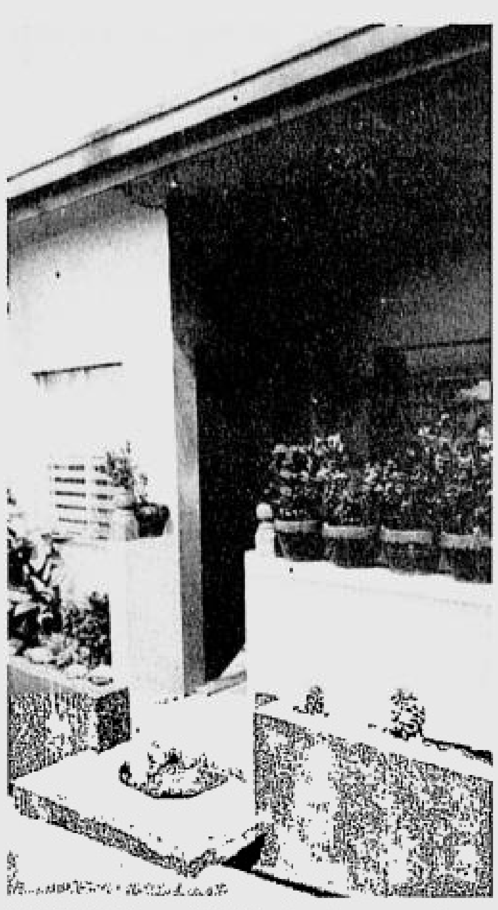
EXPORT and Industry Bank will reactivate its fully owned subsidiary, Urbancorp Development Bank Inc.

***

ELECTED directors of **Magnum Holdings Inc.** were Toribio Reyes III, Jose Abad Santos III, Felix Chung, Felix Ang, Benson Te, Edmundo Goduco and Leonor Cabarrus. ***Compiled by Maricar D. Tolosa, PDI Research***

CURRENCIES

December 22, 2003 Country	Unit	Euro Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.80795023	1.000000	55.381000
Japan	Yen	0.007495	0.009276	0.513700
United Kingdom	Pound	1.426275	1.765300	97.764100
Hongkong	Dollar	0.104054	0.128788	7.132400
Switzerland	Franc	0.643528	0.796495	44.110700
Canada	Dollar	0.605025	0.748839	41.471500
Singapore	Dollar	0.472901	0.585309	32.415000
Australia	Dollar	0.594912	0.736323	40.778300
Bahrain	Dinar*	2.143218	2.652661	146.907000
Saudi Arabia	Rial	0.215454	0.266667	14.768300
Brunei	Dollar	0.471521	0.583601	32.320400
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000095	0.000118	0.006500
Thailand	Baht	0.020413	0.025265	1.399200
UAE	Dirham	0.219994	0.272287	15.079500
Euro	Euro	1	1.237700	68.545100
Argentina	Peso	0.272496	0.337268	18.678200
Brazil	REAL	0.276317	0.341997	18.940100
Denmark	Kroner	0.134318	0.166246	9.206900
India	Rupee	0.017765	0.021988	1.217700
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.212636	0.263179	14.575100
Mexico	New Peso	0.071949	0.089051	4.931700
New Zealand	Dollar	0.519582	0.643087	35.614800
Norway	Kroner	0.120045	0.148580	8.228500
Pakistan	Rupee	0.01415	0.017513	0.969900
South Africa	Rand	0.117455	0.145374	8.051000
Korea	Won	0.000677	0.000838	0.046400
Sweden	Kroner	0.110259	0.136467	7.557700
Syria	Pound	0.018259	0.022599	1.251600
Taiwan	Nt Dollar	0.023791	0.029446	1.630700
Venezuela	Bolivar	0.000507	0.000627	0.034700



A TYPICAL house built in the slum area via the Gawad Kalinga for National Heroes Build.

McDo ties up with GK to build homes for the poor

CORPORATE CITIZEN

LAST Nov. 30, National Heroes Day, McDonald's lived up heroism and patriotism through the establishment of the McDonald's village, with 24 houses, with Gawad Kalinga in Hapay na Mangga in Taytay, Rizal, a former dumpsite of the province. The project was dubbed "Bayan Ko, love ko 'to" for National Heroes Build.

McDonald's participation in Gawad Kalinga, a movement that aims to transform slums and build 3,000 homes in 230 villages, proves that business success and social gains come together for nation building.

The National Heroes Build aims to honor our Filipino heroes by continuing their legacy and bringing out the heroes in every citizen. In 240 sites nationwide, Gawad Kalinga is mobilizing all sectors of society—universities, corporations, socio-civic groups, the youth and many others to join in finishing and painting 3,000 homes and helping transform slums into peaceful and productive communities.

According to McDonald's Managing Director Kenneth S. Yang, "Today presents an opportunity where we could give back to the community that has given us so much. Our company enjoys a position that which enable us to offer and contribute to this worthwhile task, as we deliver on our commitment to national development and building trust in the community. We believe that McDonald's can set an example for others."

Yang leads the strong hold crew and managers of McDonald's among 50,000 volunteers who are together with beneficiaries of the housing units in the spirit of bayanihan.

"With McDonald's—GK partnership, we would like to give inspiration to other corporations and the whole country to help achieve the GK777—the vision to build 700,000 houses in 7,000 communities in seven years," Yang said.

Economic . . .

From page B1

Pascua said the government would keep the budget in check in 2004. To stimulate growth, the government would pay about P60 billion in account payables next year.

Trade Undersecretary Gregory Domingo said continued foreign investments in call centers and motor vehicles would help the government achieve its target of increasing foreign direct investments to about $1 billion in 2004.

Buenaventura said the level of debt could be unsustainable over the medium term if the government was not doing anything to reduce the budget deficit. "But we have seen the government implement fiscal measures to address the deficit," he added.

Neri said that the GDP growth target of 4.9-5.8 percent in 2004 was achievable because the factors that dragged down growth this year was not expected to occur next year.

"This year, we had some drags like exports, contraction in government spending, the El Niño (weather phenomenon). In 2004, we expect better exports, higher government spending especially in construction, better weather and a pick-up in global growth," the economic planning chief said.

Neri said that contrary to expectations that the economy would slow down next year because of election-related pressures, he said growth would actually pick up because of private sector spending.

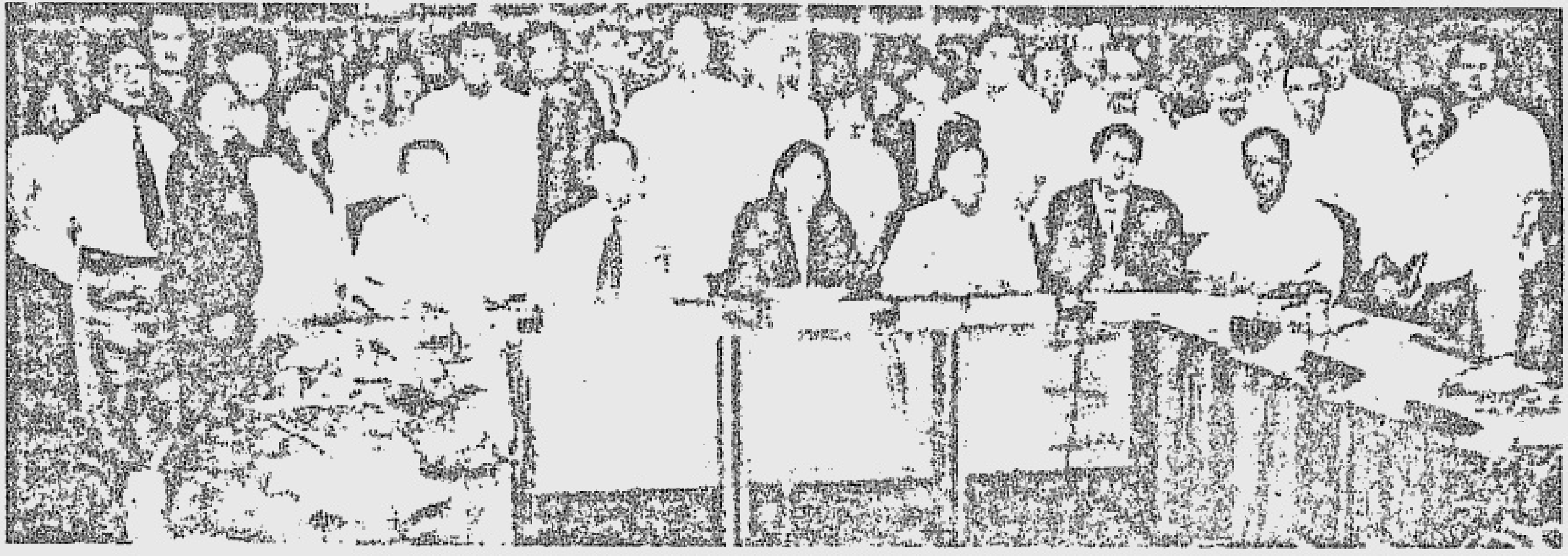
"We think the private sector would spend about P30 billion next year for the elections. That would be one big fiesta until May," said Neri.

DENR

in partnership with industry for sustainable development

The Philippine Environment Partnership Program (PEPP) became a reality Friday, December 19, 2003 with the signing of six (6) Environmental Consent Agreements (ECONAs) and Environmental Management Plans (EMPs) involving members of six industry associations.

DENR Secretary Elisea Gozun signed the agreements with the presidents of Cebu Furniture Industry Foundation (CFIF); Cement Manufacturers' Association of the Philippines (CEMAP); Center for Alcohol Research and Development (CARD) Foundation; Philippine Sugar Millers' Association (PSMA); Pulp and Paper Industry Association of the Philippines (PULPAPEL); and Semi-Conductors and Electronics Industries of the Philippines(SEIPI).



"...The intent of the program is to forge a new level of partnership with each industry, one that is open, constructive and based on trust so that environmental protection shall not take a back seat in the overall scheme of industrial development.

"...Lest we be misunderstood, however, let me stress that we are not relegating our regulatory functions. Rather, we want to play the role of a catalyst to move industries to take on more responsibilities not only in promoting economic development, but also in reducing the impact of their operations on the environment.

"It is our hope that other industry groups will follow the example shown by the six industries now in the program... as this will result in reduced pollution even as each sector will gain from improved business performance and profitability."

— DENR SECRETARY ELISEA GOZUN

INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION PROFILES

SEIPI -- SEMI-CONDUCTORS AND ELECTRONICS INDUSTRIES IN THE PHILIPPINES

Members: 103 active members

Economic Importance: One of the fastest growing industrial sectors in the Philippines over the last 15 years

Total Workforce: Employs some 335,000 employees, important markets are US and Europe

Environmental Initiatives: Most of the industries are at the top level with corporate management systems for quality and environment

Most are certified ISO 9000 series and ISO 14001

CEMAP -- CEMENT MANUFACTURERS' ASSOCIATION OF THE PHILIPPINES

CEMAP

Members: out of 20, 16 members with EMS; 7 have ISO 14001

Coverage: manufacture of clinker, portland cement, pozzolan and other types of cement

Volume of Production: 27,742 (MTPY) annual capacity

Economic Contribution: Foreign Investments infused substantial capital into the local cement industry; out of 20, 19 have foreign affiliations

Environmental Initiatives: Introduced the use of alternative fuels to reduce the negative impact of pollution

Vision: In line with the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) on efforts to address Global Warming

PULPAPEL -- PULP AND PAPER INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION OF THE PHILIPPINES

Members: 16 recycling members, 4 non-members abaca

Volume of Production: 1.1 M tons of pulp and paper board per year

Economic Importance: P25B Annual Gross Sales, $70M/yr export

Total Workforce: 1.5 million regular and seasonal personnel, directly hired (6,500 personnel)

Environmental Initiatives: Improved compliance over the years, some have already adopted EMS

Vision: Reduce waste, full compliance with standards beginning 2004 to 2008 (1st level)

PSMA -- PHILIPPINE SUGAR MILLERS' ASSOCIATION

Members: 24 members from sugar industry sector and non-members are participating ECONA (16, 8) out of 30 operating plants

Total Workforce: Over 5 million are directly dependent on industry for livelihood

Volume of Production: In 3 years average sugar production is 1.8 MT and 95% consumed domestically

Economic Importance: Contribution to economy is P34B in 2000. Exports in 2002 is about P14B

Environmental Initiatives: Formulation of Code for Environmental Management Practices to Sugar Mills, the Conduct of Pollution Management Practice and adoption of waste minimization.

Installation of modern processing equipment to improve the overall Impact of the mills

Vision: Within 10 years, achieve a modernized sugar industry that is socially responsible and environmental friendly sugar manufacturing

CARD FOUNDATION -- CENTER FOR ALCOHOL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

CARD

Members: 13 members

Volume of Production: 200 million liters per year of alcohol. Actual production is 80% of the production capacity

Environmental Initiatives: Ventured on liquid fertilization for its wastewater

Vision: To achieve an environmental performance level that is comparable with international standard

CFIF -- CEBU FURNITURE INDUSTRY FOUNDATION

CFIF

Members: CFIF has chosen to spearhead the implementation of DAO 2003-14 for the Philippines furniture industry. CFIF is at present composed of 173 furniture companies who export 80%-100% of their production output.

Economic Contribution: Cebu contributes around 80% of the country's furniture export

Total Workforce: Provides direct employment to about 52,000 workers as of 2001 wherein 86% of that number are employed by CFIF members. It also provides work for about 80,000 other personel through their subcontractors and suppliers.

Geographical Dispersal: Ninety percent of the factories are situated in three major areas such as Mandaue, Mactan and Cebu City. (Cebu City-11%; Mactan-12%; Mandaue-67%; Liloan/North-3% and Talisay/South-7%)

Distribution by Company Size: Most of the companies are small in terms of capitalization. Micro-cottage and small industries (73%), medium and large industries.

Vision: To have an Environmental Management System in place in each of the facto-

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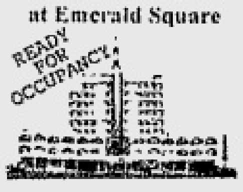
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Notice is hereby given that the estate of the late Priscilo Landig was extra-judicially settled by the heirs as per Doc #14, Page #03, Book #01, Series of 2000 by Notary Public Atty. Romerico Regio of Pasig City.
(PDI-Dec. 16, 23, 30, 2003)

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INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

The Armed Forces of the Philippines invites interested parties to apply for eligibility and to bid for the **Supply and Delivery of Force Protection Equipment** with an approved budget of **One Hundred Twenty Nine Million and Six Hundred Thousand Pesos (Php 129,600,000.00)** chargeable against the AFP Modernization Program Act Trust Fund, broken down as follows:

NOMENCLATURE	AMOUNT	
Ballistic Helmet and Body Armor Sets	Php	96,000,000.00
Ballistic Helmets Only		33,600,000.00
TOTAL	Php	129,600,000.00

Only bids from manufacturers and exclusive suppliers/distributors of said equipment shall be entertained.

The Bid documents will be available for issuance starting **16 December 2003** until **29 January 2004** during office hours (8:00 AM to 5:00 PM) at the BAC Secretariat, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Capability, Materiel and Technology Development, J9, AFP, 3rd Floor, Bulwagang Mabini, Camp General Emilio Aguinaldo, Quezon City upon payment of **Twelve Thousand Pesos (Php 12,000.00)**. The form of payment will be in cash or cashier's check in favor of the AFP Modernization Act Trust Fund.

Representatives are required to present a **Special Power of Attorney** issued by the prospective Bidder before issuance of the Bid Documents and all other transaction thereto.

A Pre-Bid Conference is scheduled on **06 January 2004** at **9:00 AM** (local time) at Silid Panday Pira, 1st Floor, Bulwagang Mabini, Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City. Bidders are encouraged to submit queries in writing to the BAC Secretariat Three (3) days prior to the Pre-Bid Conference.

Deadline for submission of eligibility requirements and bid envelopes is scheduled on **30 January 2004** at **9:00 AM** (local time) at the Silid Panday Pira, 1st Floor, Bulwagang Mabini, Camp General Emilio Aguinaldo, Quezon City which shall be followed by the Opening of Bids at 9:30 AM.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines reserves the right to reject any or all bids based on the grounds specified in RA 9184 without assuming any obligation whatsoever for any expenses or losses that may be incurred by the bidder in the preparation of the bid.

(Original Sign)
REYNALDO D RIVERA
Major General AFP
BAC Chairman

(PDI - Dec. 16 & 23, 2003)

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENSE
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INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) invites all interested parties to apply for eligibility and to bid for in the 2-Stage bid process for the **Acquisition of Equipment for Two (2) Coast Watch Stations** of the Philippine Navy with an approved budget of **Fifty Three Million and Six Hundred Thousand Pesos (Php 53,600,000.00)**. Said budget shall be charged against the AFP Modernization Program Funds.

Only bids from accredited integrators of coastal surveillance systems shall be entertained.

The 1st stage bid documents shall be available for issuance starting **15 December 2003** during office hours at the BAC Secretariat, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Capability, Materiel and Technology Development, J9, GHQ, AFP, 3rd Floor, Bulwagang Mabini, Camp General Emilio Aguilando, Quezon City. The bid documents shall be issued upon payment of **Five Thousand and Three Hundred Sixty Pesos (Php 5,360.00)**, which is not refundable. The form of payment shall be in cash or cashier's check in favor of the AFP Modernization Act Trust Fund.

A Special Power of Attorney, issued by the prospective bidder, authorizing its representative to purchase the 1st stage bid documents in its behalf, shall be required before issuance of said documents.

A Pre-Bid Conference is scheduled on **15 January 2004** at **9:00 AM** (local time) at Silid Panday Pira, 1st Floor, Bulwagang Mabini, Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City. Bidders are encouraged to submit queries in writing to the BAC Secretariat Seven (7) days prior to the Pre-Bid Conference.

Deadline for submission of eligibility requirements and bid envelopes is scheduled on **03 February 2004 at 9:00 AM** (local time) and immediately followed by the Opening of Bids at the Silid Panday Pira. Only those bidders found eligible shall be allowed to participate in the 2nd stage bidding activities.

The AFP reserves the right to reject any or all bids based on the grounds specified in RA 9184 without assuming any obligation whatsoever for any expenses or losses that may be incurred by the bidder(s) in the preparation of the bid.

(Original Sign)
REYNALDO D RIVERA
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"For God so loved the World, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have Everlasting life."

—John 3:16

Our Dearly Beloved

Michael S. Dayot

Born: December 24, 1951

Peacefully joined our Lord on December 19, 2003 at the age of 51.

His beloved mother **Jovita**; wife **Priscilla**; children **Stephanie & Sandra**; together with his siblings **Rafael, Gracie, Samuel, Gabriel & Ismael**; relatives & friends request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

His remains lie at 16 Ruby St., Casimiro Townhouse, Las Piñas until December 25, 2003.

To be transferred to 91 New York St., Cubao, Quezon City on December 26, 2003.

Interment will be announced later.

An obituary with a picture can be a fitting tribute to your departed loved one.

Always caring...

INQUIRER OBITUARIES

OBITUARY REQUIREMENTS:
❶ Copy of Death Certificate
❷ Any identification document (I.D.)

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF

SOLEDAD AYTONA ACURANTES

who peacefully joined her Creator on December 21, 2003 at the age of 83.

Her body lies at Arlington Memorial Chapels,
12 G. Araneta Avenue, Quezon City.

Interment details shall be announced later.

Her family enjoins the readers to pray for the eternal repose of her soul.

For the needs of your departed Loved Ones, the following establishments can help you.

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Tels. 747-8599, 747-8609 • Telefax 641-1780
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Tels. (075) 522-3451, 522-2120, (0917) 431-9976
CAPITOL MEMORIAL CHAPELS INC.
1305 G. Araneta Ave., Quezon City
Tel. 732-0309, 732-1095
CEBU ROLLING HILLS MEMORIAL CHAPELS INC.
Cebu Branch: A.S. Fortuna Street, Banilad, Mandaue City, Cebu
Tels. 346-2543, 346-2601
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Nivel Hills, Lahug, Cebu City, Tels. 231-0721, 231-3192
COSMOPOLITAN FUNERAL HOMES, INC.
Camus Ext. cor. J. Abad Santos, Davao City
Tels. (082) 227-1201, 227-1258
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Pasay Road, Makati City, Tel. 894-5932 to 34

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Jose Abad Santos Ave. cor. Dinalupihan St., Manuguit, Manila
Tels. 712-5102, 741-5125, 741-5133, Fax No. 711-3084
DYNASTY MEMORIAL CHAPELS
965 Del Monte Ave., Frisco, Quezon City;
Tels. 416-3231, 4162373
ERIC SANTIAGO MEMORIAL CHAPELS
26 Bayanbayanan Ave., Concepcion I, Marikina City,
Tels. 942-6044, 475-1177
FLORESCO FUNERAL HOME
219 Gen. Luna St., Concepcion, Malabon, Metro Manila;
Tels. 2812963, 2813034, 2810522
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FUNERARIA FILIPINAS
187 Real St., Zapote Almanza Las Piñas, Tels. 873-0507; 873-0024
FUNERARIA FILIPINAS
865 J.P. Rizal St., Poblacion, Makati City, Tels. 890-3556; 899-8181
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Calsadang Bago, Pateros, Metro Manila, Tels. 642-8181 to 82

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Dr. A. Santos Ave., Sucat Rd., Sucat, Parañaque City;
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Tel. 722-2730, Cell (0917) 5880138, (0917) 5880145
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LA FUNERARIA PAZ, INC.
1501 C.M. Recto Ave. cor. T. Mapua, Manila;
Tels. 711-8831 to 35, 732-4705, 732-2827
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Tels. 749-3826 to 11, 712-3001, 743-6502 or 05
LA FUNERARIA PAZ, SUCAT, INC.
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Marcos Hiway, Antipolo, Rizal
Tels. 645-1855, 682-0709, 682-0210
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Mandalagan, Bacolod City, Tel. 433-7132
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438 Camarino St., Pasay City, Tels. 831-1204
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Tels. 826-1376, 826-9682, (0915) 712-1220
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Tel. Nos. 843-88-16-30, Fax No. 843-0223
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East Greenhills, Mandaluyong City, Telefax 724-1139, 725-2044
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Manila, Tels. 749-3679, 781-1772
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298 Quezon Ave., Quezon City, Tels. [illegible] 410-8206 87
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2028 Rizal Ave., Sta. Cruz, Manila, Tels. 491-1458, 403-1540
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Official NBI Morgue 517 A. Arnaiz St., Pasay City;
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BAGUIO WATER DISTRICT

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INVITATION FOR ACCREDITATION

The BWD is inviting interested and qualified suppliers, traders, manufacturers and those duly accredited by LWUA in the BWD accreditation of suppliers for the year 2004 for the supply of the following:

A. Pumps and Motors:
  - centrifugal booster pumps, submersible turbine pumps
  - horizontal induction motors/submersible motor (5Hp - 150Hp), etc.

B. Pipes and pipe fittings as Pb, HDPE, steel, G1, brass fittings, O-rings, etc.
C. Chemicals
D. Electro-mechanical parts and accessories
E. Vehicle and vehicle spare parts
F. Water Meters
G. Office supplies/computer supplies
H. Operation and maintenance supplies

Interested suppliers are requested to secure Accreditation documents from the Purchasing Section, BWD Office, upon payment of a non-refundable fee of P500.00 not later than March, 2004.

(PDI--Dec. 23 & 30, 2003)

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Marikina Tel. 948-8827 • Baguio Tel. (074)442-6417/(074)442-[illegible]
FOR OTHER AREAS NOT LISTED PLS. CALL 928 1081 OR 927 4181

TransCo
National Transmission Corporation

December 17, 2003

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

1. Contract Code — Sp03.LSRP.VI-0004, Schedule II
   Title — **Construction, Erection and Installation of 138kV Substation Equipment for Babatngon Substation under the Leyte - Samar Reinforcement Project**
   Location — **Brgy. Gov. E. Jaro, Babatngon, Leyte**
   Contract Duration — **Three Hundred (300) Calendar Days**
2. The works to be completed by the successful bidder shall consist of furnishing all superintendence, labor, materials, supplies, tools and equipment (except materials and equipment specified to be furnished by TRANSCO), and constructing complete the substation and installing all substation equipment to complete the Construction, Erection and Installation of 138kV Substation Equipment for the BABATNGON Substation in accordance with the Plans and Specifications. The work also incudes site development, construction of new warehouse and guardhouse, etc
3. The Approved Budget for the contract to be Bid is **TWENTY SIX MILLION FOUR HUNDRED ELEVEN THOUSAND FOUR HUNDRED SIXTY ONE PESOS (PhP 26,411,461.00)** from the Internal Cash Generation (ICG) of National Transmission Corporation (TransCo).
4. Application for Eligibility is open to contractors with 115 kV minimum construction experience who have the legal, technical and financial requisites of the contract/project to be bid with the following License and Registration Particulars:
   License — at least "Category A - Specialty: Electrical Works"
   Registration — at least "Medium B - Specialty: Electrical Works"
5. Application for Eligibility shall be evaluated using "PASS/FAIL" criteria and only Eligible Bidders shall be invited by Transco in the bidding. All bids equal to or lower than the Approved Budget for the Contract to be Bid shall be evaluated based on the responsiveness of the contractor's offer to the contract under bidding subject to Postqualification before an award is made. Bid Prices submitted higher than the Approved Budget for the Contract to be Bid shall be rejected and returned outright.
6. Eligibility Documents and Forms will be available for issuance on **December 22, 2003**, at the Bids and Contracts Management Department, National Transmission Corporation, Ground Floor, Power Center, Quezon Avenue corner BIR Road, Diliman, Quezon City 1104, Telefax No.: **921-2308**, E-mail: rvalejandro@transco.ph, upon presentation of Letter of Intent, Contractor's License and a payment of non-refundable fee of PhP 600.00 per copy.
7. Deadline for submission of duly accomplished Application for Eligibility, Forms, documents and statements shall be on or before **January 12, 2004**, and shall be submitted at the registration office and address mentioned above. If the date is a non-working day or declared non-working day, the deadline for submission shall be moved the next working day immediately following said date. Late submission and/or incomplete application shall not be accepted.
8. Contractor, not yet included in the Transco's List of Registered Contractors, who wishes to participate in the public bidding, in order to facilitate eligibility checking, are requested to register with the registration office mentioned above by submitting the following basic requirements which should be maintained current and updated at least once a year. A Certificate of Registration will be issued to contractors upon approval.
   - ✓ Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) business name registration or Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) registration certificate, as appropriate;
   - ✓ Mayor's permit and/or municipal license for the current year;
   - ✓ Taxpayer's Identification Number;
   - ✓ Notarized statement of the prospective bidder that it is not "blacklisted" or barred from bidding by any Government or any of its agencies, offices, corporations or LGU's, including non-inclusion in the Consolidation Blacklisting Report issued by the Government Procurement Policy Board (GPPB);
   - ✓ Audited financial statements, stamped "received" by the BIR or its duly accredited and authorized institutions, for the immediately preceding calendar year, showing, among others, the prospective bidder's total and current assets and liabilities inclusive of Income Tax Return and Receipt of payment;
   - ✓ Contractor's License.
9. TransCo reserves the right to reject any application for Eligibility or all bids or request for registration without offering any reasons, waive any required formality therein, and to make an award to the bidder whose proposal is most advantageous to the government.
10. Additional information shall be furnished upon request. All communications should be addressed to the undersigned at the aforementioned address.

(Sgd.) **WINIFREDO SM. PANGILINAN**
Chairman
Bids and Awards Committee

(PDI - Dec 23 & 30 2003)

TransCo
National Transmission Corporation

December 17, 2003

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

1. Contract Code — **Sp03.NMSP.MI-0020**
   Title — **Construction, Erection and Installation of 138 & 69 kV Substation Equipment for the New Maco Substation**
   Location — **Brgy. Concepcion, Maco, Compostela Valley**
   Contract Duration — **Three Hundred Thirty (330) Calendar Days**
2. The works to be completed by the successful bidder shall consist of furnishing all superintendence, labor, materials, supplies, tools and equipment (except materials and equipment specified to be furnished by TRANSCO), and constructing complete the substation and installing all substation equipment to complete the Construction, Erection and Installation of 138 & 69 kV Substation Equipment for the NEW MACO Substation in accordance with the Plans and Specifications. The work also includes site development, construction of new control house building, switchyard, pumphouse, guardhouse, transmission line, etc.
3. The Approved Budget for the Contract to be Bid is **SEVENTY FIVE MILLION NINE HUNDRED NINETY TWO THOUSAND SEVEN HUNDRED FIFTY EIGHT PESOS (PhP 75,992,758.00)** from the Internal Cash Generation (ICG) of National Transmission Corporation (TransCo)
4. Application for Eligibility is open to contractors with 115 kV minimum construction experience who have the legal, technical and financial requisites of the contract/project to be bid with the following License and Registration Particulars:
   License — at least "Category AAA - Specialty: Electrical Works"
   Registration — at least "Large B - Specialty: Electrical Works"
5. Application for Eligibility shall be evaluated using "PASS/FAIL" criteria and only Eligible Bidders shall be invited by Transco in the bidding. All bids equal to or lower than the Approved Budget for the Contract to be Bid shall be evaluated based on the responsiveness of the contractor's offer to the contract under bidding subject to Postqualification before an award is made. Bid Prices submitted higher than the Approved Budget for the Contract to be Bid shall be rejected and returned outright.
6. Eligibility Documents and Forms will be available for issuance on **December 22, 2003**, at the Bids and Contracts Management Department, National Transmission Corporation, Ground Floor, Power Center, Quezon Avenue corner BIR Road, Diliman, Quezon City 1104, Telefax No.: 921-2308, E-mail: rvalejandro@transco.ph, upon presentation of Letter of Intent, Contractor's License and a payment of non-refundable fee of PhP 1,000.00 per copy.
7. Deadline for submission of duly accomplished Application for Eligibility, Forms, documents and statements shall be on or before **January 12, 2004**, and shall be submitted at the registration office and address mentioned above. If the date is a non-working day or declared non-working day, the deadline for submission shall be moved to the next working day immediately following said date. Late submission and/or incomplete application shall not be accepted.
8. Contractor, not yet included in the Transco's List of Registered Contractors, who wishes to participate in the public bidding, in order to facilitate eligibility checking, are requested to register with the registration office mentioned above by submitting the following basic requirements which should be maintained current and updated at least once a year. A Certificate of Registration will be issued to contractors upon approval
   - ✓ Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) business name registration or Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) registration certificate, as appropriate;
   - ✓ Mayor's permit and/or municipal license for the current year;
   - ✓ Taxpayer's Identification Number;
   - ✓ Notarized statement of the prospective bidder that it is not "blacklisted" or barred from bidding by the Government or any of its agencies, offices, corporations and LGU's, including non-inclusion in the Consolidation Blacklisting Report issued by the Government Procurement Policy Board (GPPB);
   - ✓ Audited financial statements stamped "received" by the BIR or its duly accredited and authorized institutions, for the immediately preceding calendar year, showing, among others, the prospective bidder's total and current assets and liabilities inclusive of Income Tax Return and Receipt of payment;
   - ✓ Contractor's License.
9. TransCo reserves the right to reject any Application for Eligibility or all bids or request for registration without offering any reasons, waive any required formality therein, and to make an award to the bidder whose proposal is most advantageous to the government
10. Additional information shall be furnished upon request. All communications should be addressed to the undersigned at the aforementioned address.

(Sgd.) **WINIFREDO SM. PANGILINAN**
Chairman
Bids and Awards Committee

(PDI - Dec 23 & 30 2003)

People, Events & Products

E-mail: pr_pep@inquirer.com.ph
aespinosa@inquirer.com.ph

Editor Aries Espinosa

Godiva's secret to E-commerce success revealed

Since launching its online store in 2000, Philippine-based natural skin care company Godiva Inc has grown into an e-commerce powerhouse, with thousands of loyal customers in over a dozen countries, by effectively utilizing the latest Internet tools to the fullest through its two online stores, www.godivaskincare.com and www.i-godiva.com.

As a model for using e-commerce in developing the global market for a Philippine brand, Godiva was awarded the IT Excellence Award, the first and only major award given by the Philippine Internet Commerce Society (PICS) during the 2nd National E-Commerce Congress and Exhibit at the Philippine Trade Training Center last Dec. 2.

Godiva is a natural skin care company, which harnesses only the best ingredients from nature to treat specific skin concerns.

Three years ago, the company launched its online store at www.godivaskincare.com to exploit opportunities for Internet commerce and to target the Filipino immigrant communities. Then local IT firm PDB SME Solutions, Inc. (now Planters Development Bank-PMMD), a subsidiary of Planters Development Bank, was tapped to set up the e-commerce platform and address Godiva's information dissemination drive.

Godiva's two websites have partnered with international online payment gateways based in the United States to facilitate credit card transactions. The company takes every precaution to protect its customers' sensitive information - both online and offline - so clients can be assured of secure transactions and safe transmission of personal details.

To remain at the forefront of e-commerce, Godiva constantly seeks new technologies and better ways of servicing its customers. The company provides proactive and personalized online customer service where concerns and queries are addressed within 24 hours. Moreover, all orders are shipped immediately, and delivered in 2 to 3 days worldwide through courier service providers FedEx and DHL.

In addressing the problem on high international shipping fees, Godiva offers its customers free worldwide shipping on orders of $50 and above. And in cases where a customer is not satisfied with the product shipped, a 100 percent refund is guaranteed without any wrangling or haggling.

Promos such as rebates and free products are being offered to increase patronage and extend goodwill among its clientele.

To keep customers in the loop, a weekly e-newsletter is sent for free to all subscribers. A special promo for e-newsletter subscribers has also been created.

Godiva's secrets to e-commerce success lie in its commitment to provide first-class security on transactions which give customers peace of mind when shopping online, highly efficient customer service, and affordable yet effective products that offer the best from nature.

For inquiries, e-mail info@godivaskincare.com or info@igodiva.com

APPLE CENTER EVENT IN CYBERZONE, SM MEGAMALL BLDG B

Representative Allan Peter Cayetano (center) and former Representative Dante Liban (3rd from right) are two of the guest of honors in the recently concluded Apple Center event in Cyberzone, SM Megamall Bldg. B. Also in photo are Lorenzo Sison, Violeta Sison, Dr. Nancy Tan, Myrabelle Tan, Lawrence Sison, Millie Sison, and Purita Garcia.

New drug launched to fight type 2 diabetes

TO REACH the recommended blood sugar levels in diabetics, many patients with type 2 diabetes (non-insulin dependent) will need to take a combination of medications that treat the disease in different ways.

A new drug shown by studies to offer better control of type 2 diabetes has been developed by GlaxoSmithKline, one of the largest research-based companies in the world. The drug is the first therapy to combine two different yet complimentary treatments of rosiglitazone and metformin, each working in distinct ways in the body to manage type 2 diabetes. Metformin works primarily on the liver to lower the blood sugar level while rosiglitazone directly targets insulin resistance, a major underlying cause of type 2 diabetes. The combination drug is locally available under the brand name Avandamet.

A study published in the Journal of American Medical Association showed that the combination of rosiglitazone and metformin significantly improved the control of insulin resistance and increased insulin production by the pancreas. This suggests that the drug combination may delay or prevent disease progression.

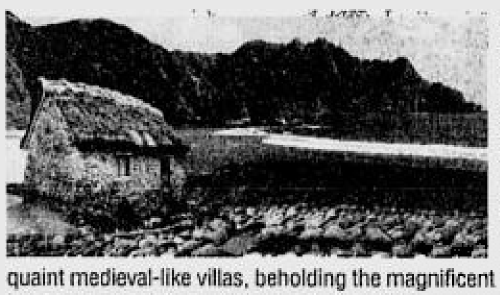
Mixing the complementary benefits provided by the two drugs, the combination has been shown to provide superior long-term blood sugar level control in patients with type 2 diabetes.

"Achieving and maintaining control of blood sugar levels is the key to preventing the complications associated with diabetes;" said Donna Lillie, national director, research and professional education, Canadian Diabetes Association.

The combination of rosiglitazone and metformin is indicated as an adjunct to diet and exercise to reduce insulin resistance and improve blood sugar control in patients with type 2 diabetes mellitus when diet, exercise and metformin or rosiglitazone alone do not result in adequate blood sugar control.

BMZ CLUB IN TAGAYTAY

Members of the BMZ Club recently met at Josephines Tagaytay for their September fun run. Shown are the members of the BMZ Club, Philippines along with the Z1 roadster, which was introduced in 1987, and the latest Z roadster, the Z4 launched last April 2003. The BMZ Club, Philippines, is an exclusive car club composed of owners of BMW roadsters. For membership inquiries, look for Doris Pastoriza through 638-0734 to 43.



2ND GREAT EXCAPES ADVENTURE SERIES

Experience a unique trekking adventure in Batanes as Sentro 1771, Sidebar Cafe and Pepsi X bring you the second leg of the Great Excapes Adventure Series. Together with the Department of Tourism Region II and Asian Spirit, four lucky guests can enjoy snorkeling in the crystal blue waters of the Pacific Ocean, mountain biking along the stone paths of Batanes' quaint medieval-like villas, beholding the magnificent scenery of Mt. Irayat and exploring the wind swept hills across the island. All it takes to join is to order a minimum of P 1,500 worth of food and beverage in Sentro 1771, Sidebar Cafe Ortigas and Malate from Oct. 14, 2003 to Jan. 12, 2004. Raffle draw is on Jan. 13, 2004. So hurry and visit Sentro 1771 at the 2nd level of Greenbelt 3, Ayala Center, Makati City (757-3940) or Sidebar Cafe at 1771 Adriatico Street, Malate Manila (525-5337) and El Pueblo, ADB Avenue corner Julia Vargas, Ortigas Center, Pasig City (631-7339).

TWO FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

ON December 24, 25, 31 and January 01, 2004, The Pearl Manila Hotel's Seven Seas Café and Oyster Bar treats you and your loved ones to a special dinner for two for the price of P600 net only. Choose from our Stuffed Porkloin, Saint Nicolas or Grilled Chateaubriand of Beef for main courses. Both set meals come with soup, salad, vegetable sidings, rice or potato croquette, dessert, coffee or tea and a glass of red wine. Truly tempting, truly merry, truly Pearl Manila. For reservations, call 400-0088 local 5011. The Pearl Manila is managed with distinction by Genesis Hotels and Resorts.

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENSE
GENERAL HEADQUARTERS
ARMED FORCES OF THE PHILIPPINES
Camp General Emilio Aguinaldo, Quezon City
Telefax Nr 4212327; 9116001 loc 6592
Website: www.afp.mil.ph
E-mail: cosb.j9@afp.mil.ph

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

(RE-BIDDING)

The Armed Forces of the Philippines invites interested parties to apply for eligibility and to bid for the **ACQUISITION OF ONE (1) F-27-500 AIRCRAFT AND ITS INTEGRATED LOGISTICS SUPPORT (ILS)** for the Philippine Air Force with an approved budget of **Ninety One Million and Two Hundred Thousand Pesos (Php 91,200,000.00)** under the AFP Modernization Program.

Only bids from prime contractors duly certified by the original equipment manufacturer (OEM), of the F-27-500 and/or by appropriate Government Aviation Authority/Agency shall be entertained.

The Bid documents will be available for issuance starting **16 December 2003 until 09 January 2004** during office hours (8:00 AM to 5:00 PM) at the BAC Secretariat, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Capability, Materiel and Technology Development, J9, AFP, 3rd Floor, Bulwagang Mabini, Camp General Emilio Aguilando, Quezon City upon payment of **Nine Thousand Pesos (Php 9,000.00)** which is not refundable. The form of payment will be in cash or cashier's check in favor of the AFP Modernization Act Trust Fund.

A Special Power of Attorney, issued by the prospective Bidder authorizing its representative to purchase the bid documents in its behalf, shall be required before issuance of the bid documents.

A Pre-Bid Conference is scheduled on **29 December 2003 at 9:00 AM** (local time) at Silid Panday Pira, 1st Floor, Bulwagang Mabini, Camp Aguinaldo, Quezon City. Bidders are required to submit their queries in writing to the BAC Secretariat three (3) days before the Pre-Bid Conference.

The deadline for submission of applications for eligibility requirements and bid envelopes is scheduled on **12 January 2004 at 2:00 PM** (local time) to be immediately followed by the Opening of Bids at the Silid Panday Pira.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines reserves the right to reject any or all bids based on the grounds specified in RA 9184 without assuming any obligation whatsoever for any expenses or losses that may be incurred by the bidder in the preparation of his bid.

FOR THE CHAIRMAN, BIDS AND AWARDS COMMITTEE.

(Original Sign)
ROBERTO G NUQUI
Brigadier General AFP
Vice-Chairman, BAC

(PDI - Dec 16 & 23, 2003)

Product FILES

Sony Ericsson present greater product variety this season

MORE than just livening up the mobile lifestyle, products and accessories from Sony Ericsson present the stocking stuffers. As the company pushes innovation through stronger imaging, connectivity and entertainment, more people will want these items under their Christmas trees.

THE SONY Ericsson Z600 - Its stylish shape and exchangeable front and back Style-Up covers easily distinguish the Z600 from the rest of the clamshell design market. These covers allow users to completely change the look of their Z600. The Z600 is a true Quick-Share product, featuring a built-in camera, bright 65K color TFD display and a range of easy-to-use imaging applications. It also has a dedicated speaker for 32-voice polyphonic sound system and Music DJ, a feature that allows aspiring music producers to compose, lay down 4-tracks of music for richer compositions and send them to their friends.

THE GAMEBOARD EBG-10 - Sony Ericsson brings mobile gaming to a new high by introducing this attachable game controller to your mobile phone. Gamers will immediately recognize its form and features - the eight-way control on the left and four action buttons on the right. Attach to the Z600 mobile phone together with the rich color screen, polyphonic sound and force feedback, it gives a mobile gaming experience closer to 'real' game console experience.

SOME of the fun design StyleUp interchangeable covers for the Sony Ericsson Z600.

Catch the Looney Tunes Back in Action Tumblers in Jollibee

Are you thirsting for some action? Well, here's an interesting way to quench it. Grab the "Looney Tunes Back in Action" tumblers in any Jollibee store nationwide.

With these new tumblers, you can add another item to your Looney Tunes collection. Just add P10 to any value and kiddie meals and upsize your choice of drink to avail a 16 oz "Looney Tunes Back in Action" Tumbler.

With an offer this affordable you can collect the tumblers in its four designs and attractive colors. You can take them with you to your offices or homes and use them anytime you want as each cup comes with a lid. Or, you can give them to your friends or family members.

So, satisfy your thirst and add another Looney Tunes premium to your collection. Dash to your nearest Jollibee store now and collect all four designs. This offer is until Dec. 31 only. Make your Jollibee meals more exciting and lalong sumasarap with the "Looney Tunes Back in Action" 16 oz tumblers.

THIRSTING FOR SOME ACTION?
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P25
P27

E-mail: pr_real_estate@inquirer.com.ph

Editor Cesar D. Mangawang

'HIP' PAD FOR P8,000 A MONTH

Pinoy yuppies can live 'Big Apple' style

By Tessa R. Salazar

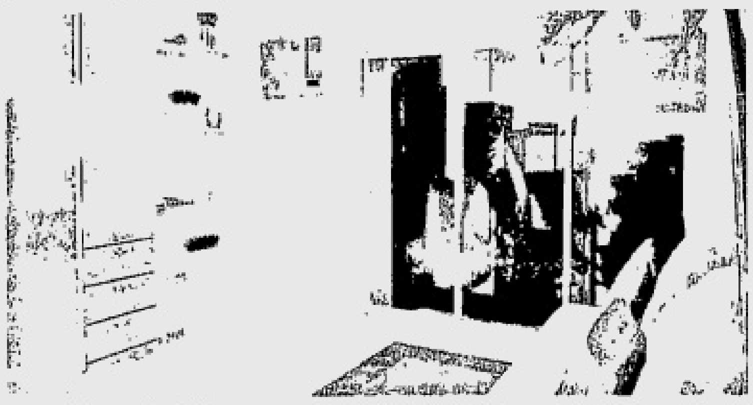
IF you're one of those driven young and independent urban professionals like the characters in the comedy sitcom "Friends" trying to make a mark in the metropolis, and would like to own a pad near your office and hangouts, a development at the corner of Edsa and Shaw Boulevard could catch your fancy.

The builders behind upscale developments such as Essensa East Forbes, West of Ayala and the Riviera Golf and Country Club, are focused on the working class this time. They are in the middle of the development of a 35-story residential twin-tower designed with young executives in mind.

'Soho' concept

With the "Soho" concept of urban living at its core, the development would be right smack in the middle of a satellite city (much like the Rockwell development concept). Only this time the satellite city would be much more accessible—at the 24-hectare lot that was formerly called the Edsa Central. That residential property will soon be named Soho Central.

The Soho concept is patterned after the "hip" neighborhoods in New York and London, and started when young artists in the 1960s quietly moved into buildings in these areas that provided lofty spaces to answer the crave for authenticity, and maybe some peace and quiet, in their living environments.



THIS is how the living room of a model unit looks.

John Victor R. Antonio, managing director and COO of Century Properties Inc., said this "quiet movement" produced areas that developed into communities and eventually metamorphosed into residential, commercial and artistic zones. He added that cities that espoused the Soho lifestyle were the liveliest and most cosmopolitan locations, where establishments encouraging social mingling such as restaurants, trendy shops, cafés and music bars and lounges were just a few steps away from the citizens' actual residences.

"The Soho lifestyle caters more for the executives. It's not a new lifestyle because a lot of developers have ventured into this. Century Properties is just branding it," Antonio said. Antonio added that the Soho concept was a hit among the Filipino yuppies, citing the Bel-Air Soho in Makati which was sold out in just five months after his team introduced it.

Connecting walkways

The Soho Central will have connecting walkways to the Edsa Central Mall and the Edsa MRT station, which would provide a direct link to Makati, Manila or Quezon City. Connecting walkways will also be linked to the Shangri-La Plaza Mall. Soho Central will also be a stone's throw away from offices, schools, churches, the Podium in Ortigas, and the Medical City in Pasig.

The twin tower's 30 to 60 sq m units will have balconies and full views of the environs. The buildings will also offer a lap pool, business center, function rooms, resident's lounge, gym, spa, landscaped Zen garden and meditation area. Laundry and dry cleaning services would also be offered within the premises. For the security conscious, the builders are designing smoke detectors and sprinkler systems all over the buildings.

And as if pampering the residents were not enough, the builders have designed four levels of Soho Central for retail and commercial areas, especially for lifestyle-oriented establishments such as cafés and restaurants. Ample parking slots would be found at the basement floors.

The best come-on, however, would be the price. The location, the units and the lifestyle are all for about P8,000 to P10,000 a month, said Antonio.

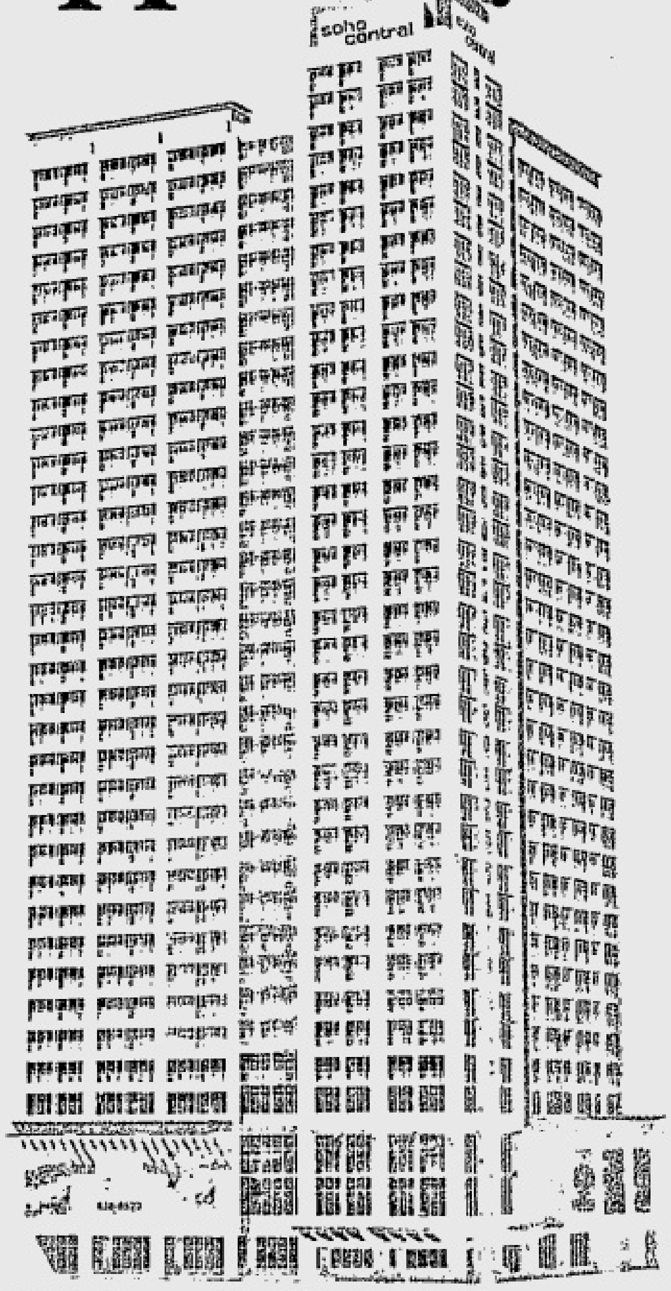
Key to mobile society

The builders of Soho Central said balance between work and pleasure is the key to a modern and mobile society. Soho Central would not just be associated with its vibrant character but also with the small-office home-office, they add. The everyday lives of human beings and their environment would be closely linked. The work, living and public areas, therefore, must be planned and designed according to the users' way of life, they say.

Expect Soho Central to sprout and surprise everyone. Antonio boasts of the developer's track record on finishing projects ahead of time. He also told the INQUIRER that the builders were selective with the projects they undertook, and that the Soho project was too good an opportunity to pass on.

Meridien Moderne Inc. and Century Communities Corp., subsidiaries of Meridien Development Group and Century Properties Inc., introduced the Soho brand in the Philippines. For those interested, model units are available for viewing. Call 830-7610, 818-3361 loc. 125, or visit www.century-properties.com. or mail sales@century-properties.com.

You don't need a helipad to be a member of the Soho community, just binoculars and an open window to call on your friends when you need some company. Just like your heartwarming and fun friends at "Friends."



ARCHITECT'S perspective of Soho Central

IBIZA building

Living the good life need not be expensive

By Charles E. Buban

WHETHER it's a condominium or a townhouse you prefer, there is one property in Metro Manila that can address your needs without having to give up all your life's savings or go to some far off place.

This is the promise assured by DMCI Homes as it formally opened its newest development, the East Ortigas Mansions located on Ortigas Avenue Extension, Pasig City.

This middle-income mixed residential development sits on a two-hectare compound with six buildings of five-story condominium units with floor spaces ranging from 50 to 121 sq m with two- to four-bedroom units.

It also has a separate cluster wherein 12 townhouses are located with the floor area of the townhouse units ranging from 100 to 212 sq m.

Conveniently located

East Ortigas Mansions' location is within 30 to 45 minutes drive the major central business districts of Ortigas and Makati, not to mention it's very near a PriceSmart outlet, Ever Gotesco Commercial Complex, Outlet Yard, Makro, Uniwide and Valley Golf.

"You'll never need to go too far to your work or your shopping trips. Unlike other properties in the market right now, the East Ortigas Mansions is very accessible to places that matter most for the residents," said Isidro Consunji, president of DMCI, the project's developer.

Affordable terms

Would-be buyers can avail of the East Ortigas Mansions' affordable terms. They can move in to the units ready for occupancy or stretch their down payment terms by opting to buy from pre-selling units.

"Discounted cash price starts from a very affordable P1.5 million while we also offer discounted terms though Pag-Ibig, in-house and bank financing," said Consunji.

There are two options at East Ortigas Mansions: five-story walk-up and three-level townhouse.

Maximum privacy

The walk-up features single-loaded corridors where each unit faces either a wide atrium or open space for maximum privacy, natural light and ventilation, individual drying areas at the roof deck and parking building with bridgeway connected to the residential buildings.

There is also a choice between a 54-sq m two-bedroom unit and a 121 sq m four-bedroom unit.

On the other hand, the three-level townhouse offers provisions for a lanai, terrace and an open deck, family room or den, three bedrooms and three toilet and bath, individual parking space and a maid's room.

First-class amenities

East Ortigas Mansions also offers first-class amenities that all its residents can use.

Foremost is the three-level Mediterranean-inspired clubhouse with spacious function rooms, beautifully landscaped courtyard, swimming pool and playground.

In front of the clubhouse is the property's swimming pool for the exclusive use of the residents.

The property also has sports and recreational facilities such as badminton, tennis and basketball courts, jogging path, game room for billiards, darts and table tennis.

"We are very excited to offer this property to our buyers and we invite them to see for themselves this new concept of ours that combines condominium living and subdivision setup," said Consunji.

Do you really save by selling on your own?

BUILDING DREAMS

By Alexis A. Acacio, Ph.D.

EACH one of would want to save money. If we can do something on our own, then why do we have to pay for services that we may never need? This thinking follows through when it comes to the real estate transaction. When one sells real property, there are always two paths to do it—(1) sell on our own; and, (2) sell it with the help of a professional that is through a real estate broker or salesman.

Selling on one's own can offer advantages:

- **You can save on commissions**—Selling on your own can save you the commission that you may have to pay the real estate professional who will sell your property. This is why most house owners would want to sell on their own.

Certain situations also warrant that you can sell on your own:

- **It is your profession**—You may be in the sales and marketing profession only that it is not real estate that you are currently selling. You may want to try your skill in selling real estate. Remember though that if you are used to selling medium-priced items in the range of a few hundred pesos, selling a P5-million property with a lot of legal paperwork is entirely a different ball game. If you are in the legal profession, then going through the process of documentation and paying the necessary taxes can be easy for you.
- **Your relatives or friends might buy the property**—If you have a ready buyer who has been constantly telling you that should you decide to sell your property, they will buy it in a snap, then go ahead—sell without an agent. In this situation, you already have a sure buyer.

If you think that you can sell your property on your own, ask yourself if you can handle these things:

- **Do you know where your buyers are?**—Selling real estate requires that you reach able, ready and willing buyers. Knowing where to find them is half the battle.

Real estate professionals work together as a team and have a network to share and to exchange listed properties. It is then made known within the network that a certain property is for sale at a certain location at a certain price. If you do sell on your own, you cannot possibly use this network without having an agreement with a broker.

- **Do you have the time?**—Selling your home will involve meeting the prospective buyer, showing them the house, answering questions and discussing financing possibilities. This can take a few hours and can easily take up the whole day especially if the property is located outside of the metropolis. Showing the property means that you may have to take off from work and cancel some of your important appointments.
- **Do you know the market value of your property?**—If you price too high, many prospective buyers would not even consider making an offer and worse, your property may not sell at all. If you price too low, then of course the property will sell in a flash but you will have lost money.

Having a real estate professional on board will give you a proper appraisal of the property so that you neither would price it too high nor too low.

- **Do you know how to negotiate?**—Selling real estate involves a series of offers and counter offers until the buyers and sellers agree on the price and terms. This process can cause a lot of stress on those who are not used to negotiating.

Your real estate professional can negotiate in your behalf.

- **Do you know the legal aspects?**—Selling real estate involves legal documentation and transfer of title. The process involves going to the various government agencies, filling up the necessary forms, paying the required taxes and picking up documents that you would need for the next process. This requires knowledge and experience and involves a lot of your valuable time.

Real estate professionals are very familiar with the process and can perform the tasks for you in a breeze.

- **Do you know the process?**—Not knowing the process of selling real property especially the legal aspects can be a waste of your valuable time or much worse, can cause you legal problems. If you sell on your own, you would still need the advice of a real estate professional or a legal counsel that means that you will also spend money on professional fees.

Final Note. Real estate research has shown that four out of five pieces of real estate property are sold through a real estate professional. If you think you can save money by selling on your own, just make sure that you are ready to face the risks of doing it on your own.

A shot at residential condo and BMW

AYALA Land Inc. rewards buyers of its prestigious residential condominium, One Legazpi Park, with a high chance to win a brand-new BMW 316i sedan. Purchasing a great home means the opportunity to own a great set of wheels as well, for one lucky buyer.

One Legazpi Park is located at the corner of Makati City's Legazpi and Rada Streets, in the heart of the busy and thriving commercial and business centers. Not only does the endeavor boast of some of the most exquisitely designed units in the country, it also features upscale amenities including a fully equipped gym, a swimming pool, a daycare center and a social hall.

Such high-class features help the city dweller experience stylish and comfortable living, amid the complex demands of an urban setting. Ayala Property Management Corp. is tasked to take care of building management, for equally worry-free provisions and services.

One homeowner's dream of owning a new BMW vehicle will definitely come true in the promo. The 2003 BMW 316i is a four-door saloon, possessing august details and standard luxuries like five-speed manual transmission, remote-controlled alarm system, and six-CD changer. A swift and pleasant ride is assured by its 1,596-cc, in-line four-cylinder powerplant.

This coveted ultimate driving machine is now up for grabs, and qualified buyers include those who will meet the following requirements: purchased a unit outright from July 15, 2003 to Dec. 31, 2003; paid less than 30 percent of the total price before July 15, 2003; and have made accumulated payments of at least 30 percent of the total price purchased within the promo period of July 15 to Dec. 31, 2003.

Buyers' entries are equal to the number of One Legazpi Park units purchased. Purchases cancelled during the promo period will be deemed invalid.

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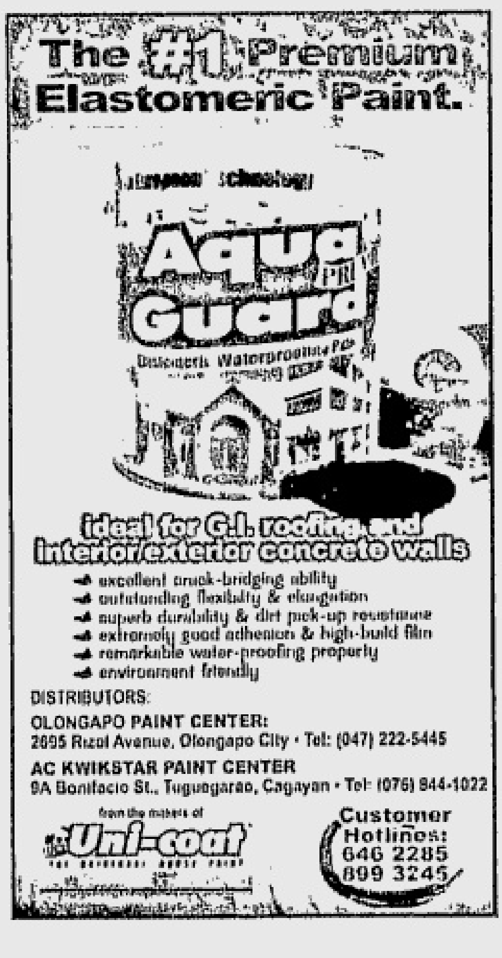
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GIHL to finalize NSC rehab plan

By Michelle V. Remo

GLOBAL Infrastructure Holdings Ltd. is set to complete its rehabilitation plan for the mothballed National Steel Corp. by the end of the year after the management committee of the NSC creditor-banks accepted the terms of its offer.

GIHL, a subsidiary of the Ispat Group of India, said in a statement that the company has tapped the services of the UK-based McLellan and Partners Ltd. to do consultancy work and to provide technical advice on NSC's rehabilitation.

GIHL won in November the right to a 90-day exclusive negotiation with the NSC creditor-banks after its original P11.905-billion bid bested the P7 billion of LNM Holdings N.V., the only other bidder.

NSC creditor-banks would decide within this period if it would ink a deal with GIHL or entertain LNM's competing bid.

The Indian firm said the initial rehabilitation plan consisted of four components, which would be undertaken simultaneously.

The first component deals with the alignment of the steel plant's manufacturing capability with the orders, while the second focuses on preparing the secondary cold-rolled processing units and the four-stand cold mill for operation.

The third component will be the start-up of the pickel line No. 2 and the five-stand cold mill, while the fourth component will be the start-up of the hot strip mills.

GIHL, who has offered P1 billion in upfront cash payment and an improved bid of P12.25 billion, said it was preparing programs to make NSC operate at full capacity.

NSC's capacity stands at 1.5 million metric tons per year.

The company also said it was willing to invest about $15 million for the reoperation of the NSC in the first year and another $10 million in the second year.

As this developed, LNM Holdings said it was willing to improve its original bid if the NSC creditor-banks fails sign a deal with GIHL.

PCCI lists qualifications of next President

THE PHILIPPINE Chamber of Commerce and Industry has drawn up its criteria for choosing the next President.

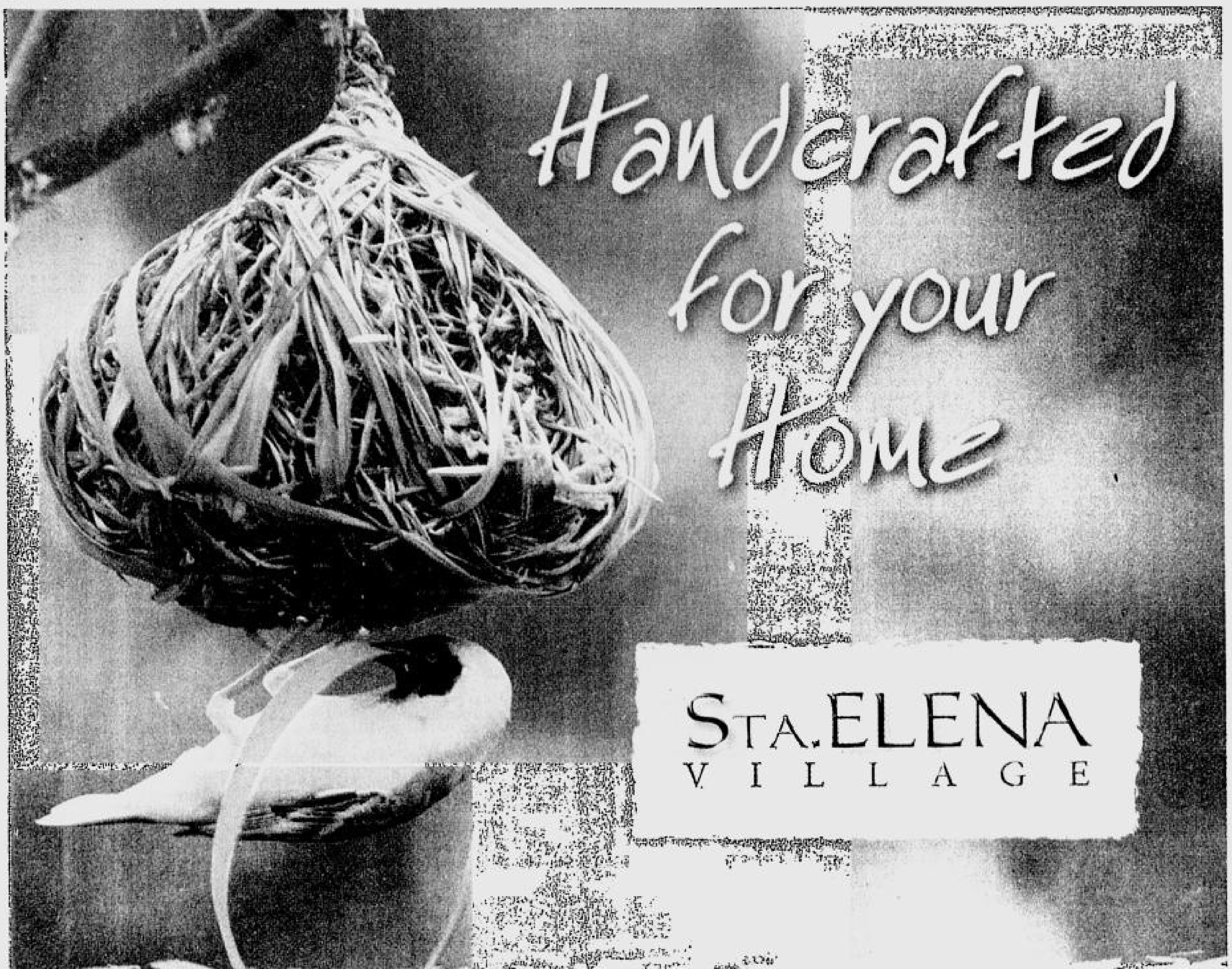
Newly elected PCCI president Noemi Saludo, the first woman president of the influential group, added that the PCCI has organized a separate unit that will monitor the resolution of national concerns that the business sector deems crucial for moving the economy forward.

Saludo said the business community was looking for a presidential bet that has a good grasp of the complexity of the country's government setup, has a good track record in governance and has the strength and political will to initiate much-needed economic reforms.

While refusing to say who among the presidential aspirants fits the business group's criteria, Saludo said businessmen want someone who has the capability to lay down the foundations for solving problems that have gradually pulled down the country's economy and made it lag behind its counterparts in the region.

Saludo said the country particularly needs to see achievements in the areas of peace and order, corruption and bureaucracy during the next President's first 100 days in office.

Michelle V. Remo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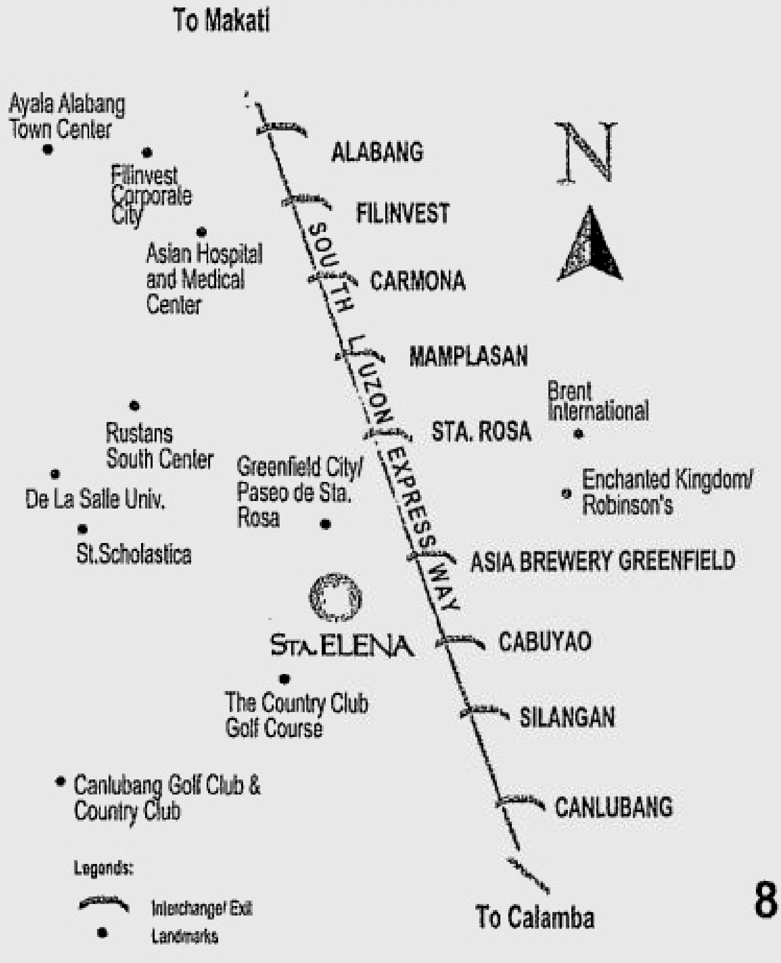

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Gov't urged to protect environment

By Christine A. Gaylican

MILITANT environmental advocacy group Greenpeace International Phils. has challenged politicians and government officials to put environment issues at the top of their agenda following the recent landslides in Southern Leyte that left over 100 dead.

"They always say that environment issues are not vital. But we can all see what environment disasters could do. It is time that they make these the main issues," Greenpeace Asia's lead campaigner Von Hernandez told the INQUIRER yesterday.

He noted that environmental issues reach the forefront only when tragedies occur and that Congress has not passed important environmental protection measures.

As a result, denuded areas have increased over the last five years.

He noted that only 19 percent of the country's estimated forest cover remain, as against the 56 percent required to maintain ecological stability.

"We easily forgot what happened in Ormoc City, Leyte in 1991 and measures to prevent such tragedies have not been put in place," Hernandez he said.

On Nov. 5, 1991, massive flash floods descended on Ormoc City in Leyte, killing about 6,000 people and leaving about 50,000 others homeless.

Mirant Phils. to upgrade BCEZ lines

By Ronnel W. Domingo

MIRANT Philippines Corp., the country's largest private power company, is investing $4.3 million (about P235 million) for the upgrade of transmission lines serving the Baguio City Economic Zone.

Paul Flake, Mirant Philippines' vice president for external affairs and business development, said in a statement the investment aimed to put up a more efficient transmission system that would ensure a more reliable power supply in the BCEZ.

"(Greater reliability of supply) could help motivate potential investors to develop and locate businesses in the zone," Flake said.

The local unit of Atlanta-based Mirant Corp. supplies electricity to the zone under a joint marketing agreement with the National Power Corp.

The investment on power lines is being carried through a three-way memorandum of agreement with Napocor and the Philippine Economic Zone Authority—operator and manager of BCEZ—which provides for:

- the construction of a new eight-kilometer, 69-kilovolt transmission line from the Itogon sub-station to the BCEZ;
- upgrade of the existing Itogon sub-station;
- rehabilitation of the existing 11-km, 69-kV La Trinidad-Beckel-BCEZ transmission line; and
- installation of a new sub-station at the BCEZ.

Mirant expects to complete by the first half of 2004 the construction of the new 8-km line, which would be the main transmission line delivering power to the zone.

On the other hand, the existing 11-km line would serve as a backup.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
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For feedback, text us at (0919) 880-3354 or (0916) 200-1160
or e-mail us at pr_lifestyle@inquirer.com.ph

Editor Chelo Banal-Formoso

A Christmas gift of health and fitness websites

WELL AND GOOD

Tina Juan

AS MY way of saying Merry Christmas to all my readers, I have compiled a list of reliable health and fitness websites that contain information that is most commonly needed.

Health and fitness hoaxes

The next time a well-meaning friend or relative sends you an e-mail with a warning that soy milk causes breast cancer or that Coca-Cola can dissolve a tooth or piece of meat in one day, do yourself a favor and go to the following websites before you panic or make other people panic needlessly by forwarding the same message all over the world.

- www.snopes.com

"The Urban Legends References Pages" by David and Barbara Mikkelsen not only clears up health hoaxes but also corrects "common fallacies, misinformation, old wives' tales, strange news stories, rumors, celebrity gossip and similar items."

- www.urbanlegends.about.com

Writer David Emery is an "avid chronicler of urban folklore" who promises to "debunk, déconstruct and discuss the most popular tall tales and hoaxes in circulation."

Nutrition

There are hundreds of thousands of nutrition websites on the Internet. The question is, which one can you trust to give you accurate information? Here are two you can count on.

- www.navigator.tufts.edu

"The Tufts University Nutrition Navigator is the first online rating and review

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3. Show the text message and surrender your SIM casing at any participating Odyssey outlet, Caltex Star Mart, Shell Select, Petron Treats, Nestlé Ice Cream Parlor or Cart to get the FREE My Precious Nestlé NonStop from Globe with 3 Nestlé NonStop Black Desire cups inside. The outlet representative or cart vendor will delete the text message upon redemption.
4. For help in claiming, you can also call the Nestlé Manila Hotline at (632) 721-8714.
5. Each person can only claim a maximum of five (5) gift packs. You can redeem until March 15, 2004.
6. Employees of Globe Telecom, Nestlé Philippines, Odyssey, Caltex Star Mart, Shell Select, Petron Treats, Harrison Communications, Inc. and Globe dealers, including their relatives up to the second degree of consanguinity or affinity are disqualified from this promo.

Promo period: Dec. 7, 2003 to Jan. 15, 2004
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VICKIE Perez de Tagle, Cecile Ysmael, Dixie Mabanta, Janine de Padua, Rosanna Escudero and Peng Perez de Tagle, all having a blast

CHILLING IT. Reujen Lista, Warren Norton,Bingbing de Guzman and Lizza Araneta Marcos

V'S MOVERS. Businessman Pedro Roxas and wife Gina Tambunting applauding K.O. Jones band

A king marks a milestone

WITHOUT BATTING AN EYELASH

Maurice Arcache

Photos by
Alex Van Hagen on Kodak Max

THE UNDISPUTED king of Manille's nightlife, **Louie Ysmael**, threw a huge bash for his 50-something birthday at the upscale V Bar.

The party started promptly at 9 p.m. with tons of invitees and a couple of trying-hards making a beeline to the food. No-charge booze flowed as the party-goers were treated to fabulous martinis and stiff scotch, courtesy of Platinum Vault and Premier Wine and Spirits. V Bar's renowned finger foods and pizzas were served throughout the night.

At 10 p.m., the fab K.O. Jones, Manille's premier old-school rock band, took center stage to serenade the guests, rocking V Bar with classic rock tunes from the '70s, darlings. Everyone jumped off their seats, waving and rocking to the heart-pumping sounds.

Before the first set ended, K.O. Jones did their special rock rendition of the classic "Happy Birthday" song to honor the man of the hour, who sat beside his eye-catching wife, **Cecile Chang.**

Taking a breather from the band, V dished out the meanest and most popular '90s euphoria music courtesy of Louie Y's super extensive music library, *palanggas*.

At around 1 a.m., everyone was pumped up with adrenalin and ready for more headbanging, pulsating classic rock tunes from the band, which gamely obliged as their manager, **Bingbing de Guzman,** watched with pride from the sidelines.

Hotshots on the fast lane having a blast included **Tina Bitanga, Margarita Locsin,** dance empress **Becky Garcia**, Heritage Hotel's **Geena Zablan**, head-turner **Rosanna Escudero,** handsome **Dale Villar** and eye-catching **Bianca Zobel.** Also there was beautiful couple **Faith Amigo-Lavarro** and **Ritchie Lavarro.**

Going wild to the band's beat were super attractive **Angelu de Leon**, vivacious **Vickie Perez de Tagle** and her husband, mega businessman **Peng**, and **David** and **Janine de Padua.**

At 2 a.m. the band called it quits, *palanggas*, and the swinging sounds of '90s club music played on and on and on. Louie Y. was hanging out with pals and business partners like **Pedro Roxas,** who breezed in with his wife, fashion plate **Gina Tambunting. Jess Medina** and ace music man **Chito Melo** were the fun guys, enjoying their drinks with **Benjie** and **Yvette Sevilla, Gil** and **Mary Rose** and **Lizzie Arce** and **Edwin Arce.**

ALFRED and Letty Hahn

RUSTAN'S top designer Criselda Lontoc and Rustan Commercial Corp.'s Bienvenido R. Tantoco Jr.

Outside V, loads of our town's hip and not-so-hip set had their "fix" smoking their lungs out, as they chilled from the mob inside.

Heading the group were our *palanggas* **Celine Lopez** and **Pepper Teehankee, JR Isaac,** Shu Uemura's **Tina Tinio, DJ Montano** of Annam, the newest yummy Vietnamese resto in Malate; and here, there and everywhere was **Tim Yap.**

It was 4 a.m. and the beat was still going on and up, *palanggas*. As Louie Y. surveyed the scene with a smile, he told *moi*, "You know Maurice, life has been good to me. At my age, having the things I have, my beautiful family, my loyal friends, my staunch supporters and my successful business ventures—I don't think there is anything more I can ask for."

I was looking at the smile of a very contented, lucky man, indeed.

Looking around, *moi* noticed that many of V's regular married men brought their own wives that night. And there was that hot-hot looking babe, socially known as, "the creme de la crumb!" Oops.

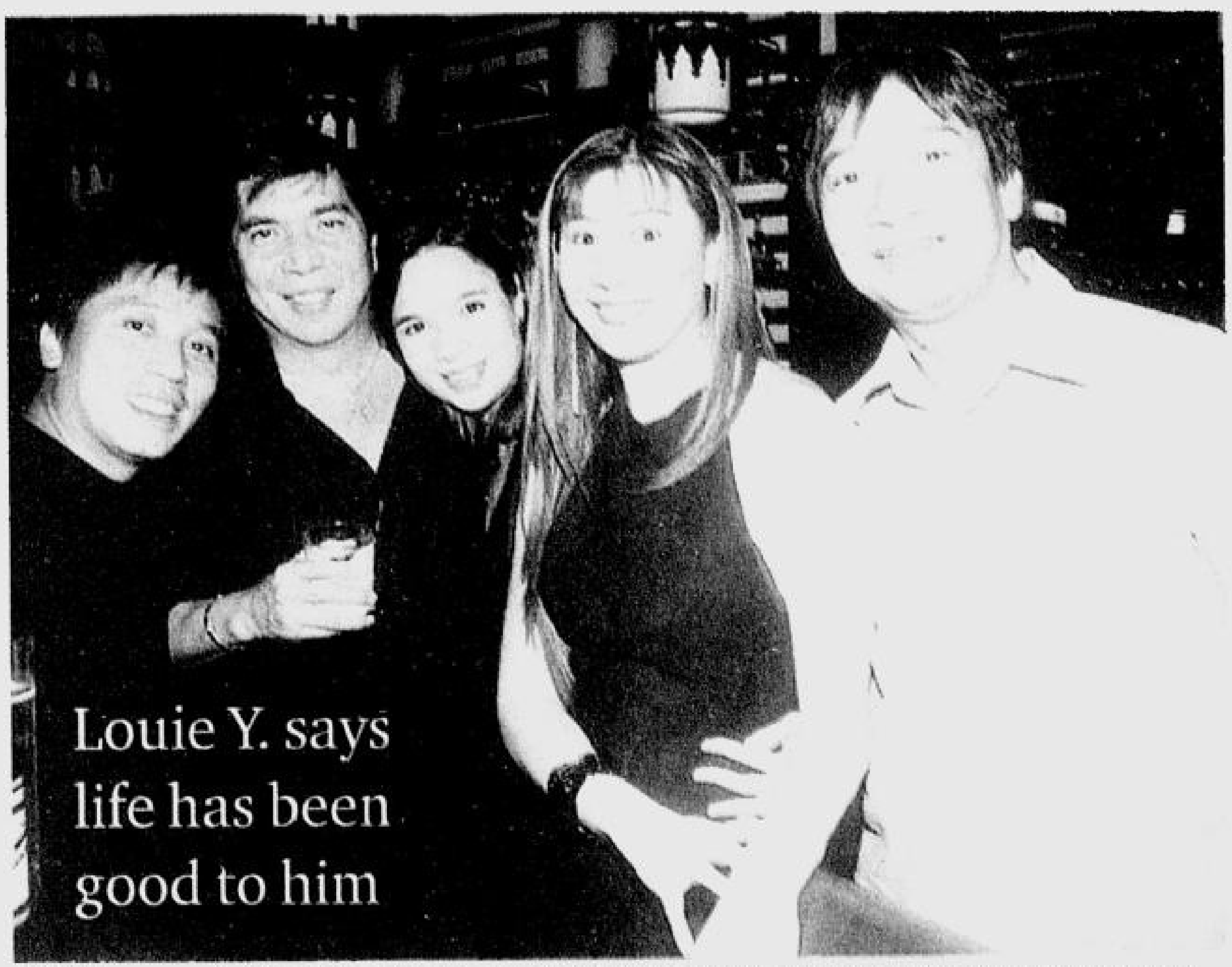
There was also this hotshot business magnate "who didn't want to go to parties."

But would you believe? His wife told me that, "at the end, he didn't want to go home and was one of the last to leave at 5 a.m."

One of the party gals was wearing a perfume called "Trapeze."

"I've never heard of it," I told her, as I commented on its super scent. Well, she answered, "I love Trapeze because there's danger in every drop!" With that, I was out of there and dashed home, but not before I had my bowl of V's terrific yum-yum, hot, *arroz caldo*. D-e-l-i-cious.

Needless to say, Louie Y.'s bash was definitely a hip, happening night of action, *palanggas*.



Louie Y. says life has been good to him

ARCE'S creamy pack. Dennis Arce with the celebrator Louie Y., Lizzie Arce, V's first lady Cecile Ysmael and Edwin Arce

DALE Villar and Bianca Zobel

PARTY TIME. Young restaurateur DJ Montano, working gal Tina Tinio, Louie Y., Errol Rara; (seated) Celine Lopez, Manny del Rosario and Tim Yap

Gem of a collection

That world-class, renowned jeweler of the rich, the famous and the not-so-famous, Cartier, presented some of its most exquisite and expensive jewelry creations at a *tres tres*, (as in very very) exclusive private viewing in posh North Forbes, which was timed perfectly during a gorgeous full moon.

The gorgeous and extraordinary collection of truly unique pieces was specially jetted into Cosmo Manille just for the evening's chic occasion.

Hotshot persona, Monsieur **Maxine Elgue,** managing director of Cartier Far East, said, "Cartier is very pleased to bring to Manille a collection of such prestigious pieces. These divine creations reflect our 150-year heritage of extraordinary jewelry-making and accentuate our reputation as the King of Jewelers and the Jeweler of Kings."

The dazzling star of Cartier's super jewelry creations was the white gold Satine necklace, set with 169 diamonds, totaling a mind-boggling 17.86 carats, would you believe?

To celebrate this exclusive special event, *palanggas,* Cartier, together with Rustan's, invited a few chosen people to an excellently prepared private dinner by the Peninsula Hotel, at the sprawling home in North Forbes of one of our town's hostesses with the mostest, Consul of Belize, **Helen Ong.**

Rustan Commercial Corporation president **Bienvenido R. Tantoco Jr.**, with his attractive Southern belle, **Nena Vargas T**; Rustan's workasonic director for marketing, cyber smart **Marilen Tantoco Valbuena; Ernie** and **Fe Yu**; tall, elegant **Estrella Dragon**; Her Excellency, the *tres charmante* French Ambassador **Renee Veyret; Tessie Ong;** top plastic surgeon **George Neri** and his wife, top golfer **May N.**; old wealth society couple **Paeng** and **Mely Hechanova,** plus, other Cartier followers like them, *palanggas,* were there.

After dinner, one gentleman who divorced his wife in the United States where she now lives, commented to some guests, "If you think this price of Cartier is high, well, I'm paying my wife $2,000 in alimony every month."

Prompting one socialite to answer, "Why not pay a lump sum of money to a young man to marry her so she'll leave you alone?"

"With the way she looks now, I don't think any young man would marry her for any amount," he answered. Oops! With that, I was out of there.

But not before *moi* scrutinized the jewelry. I must admit that those divine Cartier creations are true *objet d'art*.

Hey, *palanggas,* have a merry, merry Christmas and enjoy the day with your famille and loved ones. Please don't overeat, okay?

V'S ORIGINAL. Music man Chito Melo, Gil Aquino, Louie Y. and Mary Rose Aquino

BURGER Machine's Fe Rodriguez with Maxine Elgue

DIAMONDS are a girl's best friend. Nini Licaros and May Neri

THE GRAND hostess of the exclusive Cartier's private showing, Helen Ong; Ann Nicole Carlos with dad Vince, and managing director for Cartier Far East Maxine Elgue

AGNES Huibonhoa, Nene Leonor and Evie Costa

CARTIER GALS. Maritess Pineda, Angelina Cockrel and Nancy Tambunting

A Christmas gift of health and fitness websites

Here's a list of Internet sites that contain reliable information on everything from product hoaxes to nutrition guides

From page C1

guide designed to help you sort through the large volume of nutrition information on the Internet and find accurate, useful nutrition information you can trust. Websites are reviewed by Tufts nutritionists who apply rating and evaluation criteria developed by a prestigious panel of leading US and Canadian nutrition experts. Site reviews are updated quarterly to ensure the ratings take into account the ever-changing Internet and nutrition environments."

- www.nutritionnewsfocus.com

This free daily newsletter written by professor of Nutrition David Klurfeld is extremely helpful in taking the confusion out of nutrition news. Many dieticians, nutritionists, medical personnel and health/fitness writers depend on Klurfeld's advisory to keep them abreast of the latest nutrition news without getting an information overload. Klurfeld writes in a no-nonsense, easy-to-understand manner that even ordinary people can comprehend.

Infomercial products

People are always asking my opinion about fitness gadgets they have seen on TV infomercials. It's difficult to answer them because with so many products being sold, I don't have the time to watch all the fitness infomercials being aired, much less try the products. Whether it's an ab machine or a kitchen blender you are planning to buy, I would suggest a visit to one of the following websites to protect yourself from buying a shoddy or bogus product or to confirm that you are buying an effective and reliable one.

- http://www.epinions.com/sprt-All-Exercise_Equipment

The Epinions Community Website helps people make informed buying decisions with good-and-bad product reviews and comparative shopping information.

- www.urateit.com

This website is dedicated to helping consumers keep themselves informed about products sold by infomercials or marked with the "As Seen on TV" label.

- www.krbc9.com/diw

Each week, KRBC-9 News (a division of the NBC TV Network) puts infomercial products to the test in its "Does It Work?" segment. You will find reviews of all kinds of products, not just fitness contraptions.

- http://www.fitnessinfomercialreview.com/productreviews.htm

Positive and negative client reviews for everything from supplements to videos to abdominal machines.

- http://www.infomercialscams.com/fitness.htm

Unedited complaints from clients covering all categories of infomercial products (household and cooking, money making systems, health and beauty, fitness, automotive, and many more). Excellent advice on common scams like money back guarantees, hidden shipping charges, etc.

Exercise videos

Before you order an exercise video from the Internet or before you buy one from a local video shop, drop by this website first to find out more.

- www.collagevideo.com

All the videos have been reviewed by an American Council on Exercise certified instructor and a "regular" person.

For fitness professionals

This is a list of professional associations and resources for instructors and managers in the fitness field.

- www.ideafit.com

Here is where you will find information about the IDEA World Fitness Convention.

- www.acefitness.org

The American Council on Exercise is only one of two certifying bodies that are accredited by the US government. Information about when the Philippines is holding the biannual exams to certify instructors is posted here.

- www.ihrsa.org

The International Health, Racquet and Sports Club Association is where you can get the latest news and statistics on the worldwide fitness industry.

- www.fitnessmanagement.com or www.clubindustry.com

Articles on all aspects of managing a fitness center, like "How fitness centers can lose money on each membership sold."

- www.powermusic.com; www.dynamixmusic.com; www.musicflex.com; www.musclemixes.com

Professional aerobics music is available at these websites, as well as music for almost every kind of fitness activity from yoga to pep dancing.

- www.stepcenter.com and www.turnstep.com

Free aerobic choreography for step, high-low impact and kickboxing.

Calorie counters

- www.calorie-count.com
- www.foodfacts.info

This site specializes in fast-food calories.

- http://www.caloriecontrol.org/exercalc.html or http://www.primusweb.com/fitnesspartner/jumpsite/calculat.htm

Find out how many calories you burn when you play badminton, do yoga or go for a run on the treadmill.

- http://www.weightlossforgood.co.uk/calorie_intake_calculator.htm

A site to find out how many calories you need in a day to lose or maintain your weight.

Food and exercise diary

- www.fitday.com

Keeping a food and exercise diary is a powerful tool for losing weight, improving eating habits and staying at peak performance. This free website allows you to log in daily and enter your foods, activities and weight. By analyzing what you entered, graphical reports on calories, fat/carbohydrate/protein intakes, nutritional analysis, exercise expenditure, weight loss progress and more are generated.

Supplements

Here are unbiased organizations that offer information on food supplements like herbals, weight-loss pills, bodybuilding supplements, etc.

- http://ods.od.nih.gov/databases/ibids.html

The International Bibliographic Information on Dietary Supplements (Ibids) is one of the most comprehensive databases for supplement information. It is maintained by the Office of Dietary Supplements of the National Institute of Health. It is designed to be user friendly so ordinary consumers as well as health professionals may access information easily. After you click on the "search Ibids" button, choose the consumer database.

- http://www.gssiweb.com

The Gatorade Sports Science Institute is a valuable site for athletic supplement information. All the articles are written by health professionals well versed in the field of sports nutrition.

- http://www.consumerlab.com

This website provides "independent test results and information to help consumers and healthcare professionals evaluate health, wellness and nutrition products." It publishes results of its tests online, including listings of brands that have passed testing. Products that pass CL's testing are eligible to bear the "CL Seal of Approval."

Bodybuilding

- www.fitren.com

The only bodybuilding website that I can recommend is that of natural drug-free bodybuilder Tom Venuto. As he says, "You don't need diet drugs, steroids, hormones or any other unnatural substance to develop a great body—all you need is the proper approach to training and nutrition."

If you want to know the truth about gaining muscles, developing a six-pack and getting ripped off, this is the site you should go to. This is also where you should go if you want honest in-depth information on whey protein, amino acids, creatine and other more exotic body building supplements.

For past articles/exercises and suggestions for future columns, go to www.tinajuanfitness.info

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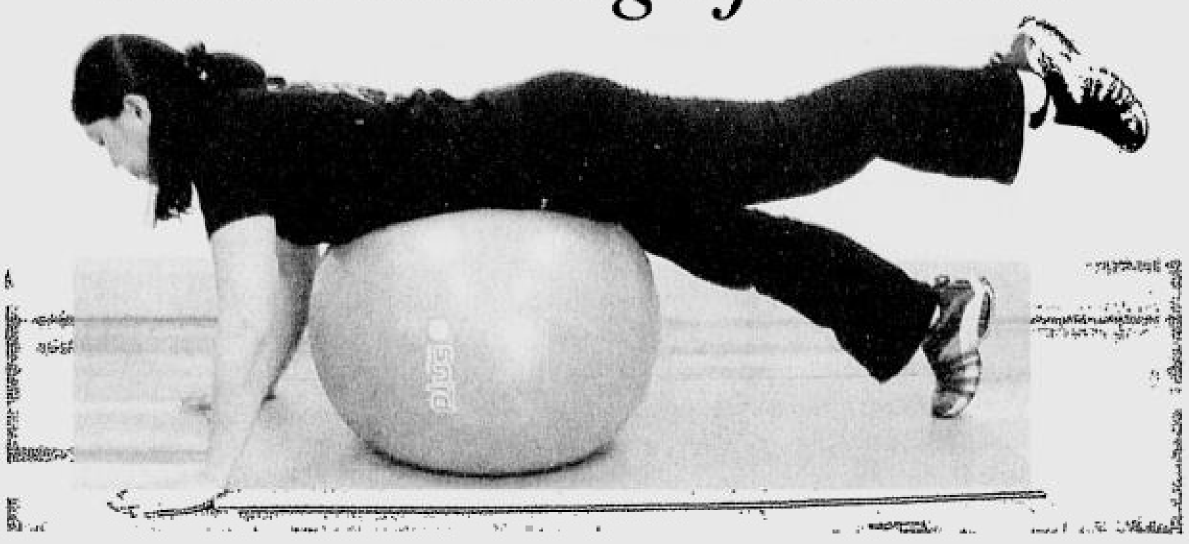
EXERCISE OF THE WEEK

Prone back leg lift on ball



THIS exercise strengthens and firms the buttocks and hamstrings or back of thighs.

Equipment:

Stability ball. As a substitute, you can do the exercise on a firm bed.

Exercise technique:

1. Kneel down with the ball in front of you.
2. Place your torso on the ball and roll forward until you have both hands on the floor. Your legs should be straight behind you on your toes.
3. Contract your buttocks and lift the right leg up to hip level.
4. Slowly lower down. Do the desired number of repetitions, then switch legs.

Performance tips:

1. Exhale as you lift the leg; inhale as you lower it down.
2. Look down at the floor but keep your neck in line with your spine.
3. Lift your leg with control. Contract your buttocks muscles first before lifting.
4. To make the exercise harder, use ankle weights.

Repetitions:

Do 10 repetitions on each leg.

A growing search for the sacred

INNER AWARENESS

Jaime T. Licauco

SOCIAL commentators and academics consider an individual's quest for spirituality as something akin to the pursuit of alcohol—that is, as mere escapism. However, this may no longer be a valid point of view as more and more people search for deeper meaning in their lives.

The usually secular Newsweek magazine featured in its Nov. 28, 1994 issue a cover story called "The Search for the Sacred, The New Quest for Spiritual Meaning", because of an obvious trend that's becoming harder to ignore.

"Check out the barometers in the cultural marketplace," says Newsweek. "Bookstores are lined with spiritual missions. Music stores feature best-selling Gregorian chants. Hollywood salts its scripts with divine references and after-life experiences ...

"These are amazing times: Pope John Paul II's new book 'Crossing the Threshold of Hope', tops the bestseller list, beating out Faye Resnick's raunchy tell-all about Nicole Brown Simpson. James Redfield's spiritual novel, 'The Celestine Prophecy', is at the top of the fiction list. In the music world, Motown no longer has the monopoly on soul. Since March, Angel Records has sold 2.8 million copies of the CD 'Chant' by the Benedictine Monks of Santo Domingo de Silos.

"Something's going on, and the people want to talk about it. Celebrities as different as tennis star André Agassi and playwright David Neanet tell interviewers how they found God in their lives. Politicians, like Newt Gingrich, have pushed school prayer onto the national agenda. Talk shows, such as 'Oprah', have featured spirituality. Physicists debate the spiritual significance of quantum mechanics. Attendance at religious retreats has skyrocketed ...

"This fall, 2000 people showed up for a conference on body and soul featuring such heavy speakers as Dr. Dean Ornish, who advocates a diet-cum-spiritual cure for heart disease, and Dr. Bernie Siegel, author of 'Love, Medicine and Miracles'."

The Philippines, which has had a long spiritual tradition antedating Christianity, has also been experiencing a strong spiritualist revival in the last two decades.

The phenomenal growth of a Catholic Charismatic group called El Shaddai, which now boasts of eight million members, is a witness to this trend. Attendance at church services of all major religions in the country is also up.

We don't have an opinion survey similar to what Newsweek did for that cover story, but I feel that a similar trend (if not higher percentages) will be discovered if one were conducted in the Philippines.

In the Newsweek survey, "58 percent feel the need to experience spiritual growth, 33 percent have had a religious or mystical experience, 20 percent say they have had a revelation from God in the last year, and 13 percent say they have seen or sensed the presence of an angel. Sixty percent think a person needs to believe in God in order to experience the sacred, and outside the church, 45 percent sense the sacred during meditation, 68 percent at the birth of a child and 26 percent during sex."

No longer 'weird'

The growing sense of the divine or presence of the spirit in our daily affairs has been here for a long time, but the difference is that now, people are willing to talk about it and share such experiences with others, whereas before, they would hide it from their friends and relatives for fear of being ridiculed or being considered "weird."

This is true. In almost every social gathering I've attended, here or abroad, people I meet are more willing to talk today about their encounters with the supernatural and the mystical than they would perhaps a decade or two ago.

This growing openness to the divine and the sacred in our lives is heartening and inspiring.

James W. Jones, a religion professor at Rutgers University, used to scoff at the smorgasbord type of religion that some New Agers espouse.

"But now," according to Newsweek, "he believes that a person who has synthesized different traditions can find a path that 'may be as spiritually profound as traditional religions or even more spiritually profound'."

Christmas no longer means merely party-going or gift-giving, but the chance to renew our contact with the divine through the person of Christ.

Jesus' birth, more than anything else, means the responsibility of man becoming as divine as God, rather than the old teaching of God becoming man. Surely a major paradigm shift is occurring in our consciousness, and only the most dense or the most prejudiced fail to see it.

Take Charge Doc!
Nicky S. Montoya, M.D.
MEDICard

Looking to learn more about your benefits under your MEDICard coverage? Do you want to be clear on the procedures, which allow you to avail of MEDICard's services? Get your information straight from MEDICard's Medical Director, DR. NICKY S. MONTOYA.

FAQs (frequently asked questions)

Our company just renewed our MEDICard membership. Especially during the holiday season, will we be able to avail of any needed medical care without our new membership cards?

Yes. In lieu of your new membership cards, you may use your expired ones. This will only be honored during the duration of your new card's processing. We have made notice to accredited clinics and hospitals of your company's contract renewal with us. In any event of your need for medical care, they will closely coordinate with our call center that will validate your membership through an updated list of members provided by your company.

Meet your MEDICard Team

Eye specialist, Dr. Dina M. Peralta has been in the service of MEDICard members for more than seven years now. "Doktora Peralta", as her patients have become accustomed to call her, finished Medicine at the University of Sto. Tomas and took her residency training for Ophthalmology at the UST Hospital. She continued to pursue her studies, taking subspecialty training in Ophthalmic Plastic, Reconstructive and Orbital Surgery at the University of Cincinnati Medical Center in Ohio and in Pediatric Ophthalmology at the Cole Eye Institute in Cleveland. Members may visit her for consultations. from Mondays to Saturdays, 9 AM to 12 noon, Room 903, CHBC of St. Luke's Medical Center in Quezon City.

The medical coordinator is the head and team leader of all accredited doctors in a hospital. And Dr. Maria Margaret L. Quiblat has been tasked to this at the Cagayan Capitol General Hospital. Doktora Margaret, a Medicine graduate from Cebu Doctors Hospital, specializes in Gastroenterology and subspecializes in Therapeutic Endoscopy. She is a Fellow and Diplomate of the Philippine College of Physicians, a Diplomate of the Philippine Society of Gastroenterology and the current chair of the endoscopy center of the hospital. For all your medical needs, look for medical coordinator Maria Margaret Quiblat. Cagayan Capitol General Hospital is located at Gusa Highway, Cagayan de Oro, Misamis Oriental.

Philippine Orthodontics Society member, Dr. Felicitas C. Ducusin has been a dental care provider for the HMO for over five years. This loving mother of two, began her career in this field after graduating Doctor in Dental Medicine from Centro Escolar University. Thereafter, she took a post graduate intensive course on Orthodontics Diagnosis, Treatment and Planning at the Center for Orthodontics Training Center. Dr. Ducusin is also affiliated with the Philippine Dental Association and the Laguna Dental Chapter. Doktora loves to travel and frequently spends her free time reading. For consultations, members may visit her at Come-Ducusin Dental Clinic at Real National Highway, Calamba, Laguna. Clinic hours are every Mondays and Fridays, 9 AM to 12 noon, Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 9 AM to 6 PM and on Wednesdays and Saturdays, 2 to 6 PM.

We encourage all MEDICard members to voice out their concerns and issues at hand. BE HEARD AND BE READ. You can write DR. NICKY S. MONTOYA at 9/F Sagittarius Bldg. H.V. De la Costa St., Salcedo Village, Makati City or e-mail him at inquiry@medicardphils.com. For feedback on availment of our services, e-mail us at feedback@medicardphils.com.

For inquiries on individual or family membership, dial 818-2161. For group or corporate membership, dial 812-8360, 817-5136 or 817-4985 and look for a membership consultant. For Cebu Sales Office call (032) 253-5031; For Davao Sales Office call (082) 224-6931/305-3386.

TEXT MEDICARD: Key in MEDICARD and send to 2344 (Globe & Touch Mobile) or 4627 (Smart & Talk N' Text).
VISIT OUR WEBSITE: www.medicardphils.com.

MEDICard is the first HMO in the Philippines and the whole Asia Pacific Region to be ISO CERTIFIED

The path to love and wellness

"When you truly find love, you find yourself."—Dr. Deepak Chopra

INSIDE OUT

Cory Quirino

THE ONLY THING permanent in life is its impermanence. Or so they say. But there is a new way of looking at things beyond the known and tried—the path to love. And its stages are as follows:

Surrender to find passion. Allow yourself to be swept away along life's river. Without surrender, passion is focused only on cravings for stimulation and pleasure. With passion, life's never-ending possibilities are open to you.

Savor the fruit of ecstasy by letting go of your selfish attachments. Trust that love lives in your center, one that will give you peace and ultimately joy.

You are loved

This message is for: a) those who are with a beloved; b) those who do not have an earthly beloved but God. When you as a person do anything without a loving intent, then there is a split in your persona. And the more you do things out of personal ambition and self-gratification, the gap between your spirit and personality widens. The things that block love are anger, fear, egotism, insecurity and mistrust. Those that open the door to love are peace, faith, selflessness, confidence and trust. When you have walked through that door, then you are loved.

Your true nature is…

Spirit. Behind the expression "love is life and life is love" is ancient wisdom. It is love based on spirit—that the underlying motivation in all we do is soulful—non-violent and healing. And that we can return to our true nature and turn our back from our unloving behavior and consider it a long and bad dream. What must take place now is the start of good dreams which should be your life.

The beginning of awakening where the path to love starts is the realization that separation, loneliness and the pain of isolation are real for you but are illusions. If you do not accept it, then the love that flows to you is constricted and limited. The healer in you should take charge and know no limits. If you are prepared to put your whole being into love then the flow of love is unlimited. This is the true reality.

The real gift

If human vision has a blind spot, then the heart has a blind spot as well. But what makes for perfect vision is the spirit. There is a longing that waits to be filled which only love can do. So, what do you want? Most would say sex, romance and pleasure that the ideal husband/wife/lover /beloved is supposed to gift us with. But in reality, according to wise men, you are the gift and the giver is you. And this makes love the only blessing.

The great teachers have said it time and again—love in all its levels. To scale the wall of separation and to reach out to a lover, friend, family or stranger is to act in the name of love. If you live your life in this manner, then love is not apart from us but is in us. The quest for the self is then possible.

Are you happy?

Most would answer yes. Nowadays, happiness is based on stimulus and the pleasure response. So when the source of pleasure vanishes (because what once enchanted you is now ordinary, repeated and part of the scenery), people tend to look for new stimulus. No relationship can survive under these conditions because happiness is based on outside factors. The solution? Find a source of happiness beyond change based on the internal—the way of the spirit.

Love and the immune response

In short, a hug is the best medicine. Loving gestures can heal. Mother Teresa used to embrace poor children, even those with leprosy. This act alone enhanced the immune response of the body. Women with breast cancer, in a study group from Stanford, lived longer if they participated in group therapy.

The question is: Can love given on a more intensive scale promote greater healing? The answer lies in each of us.

You are on the path when you…

- can give on all levels
- don't expect anything in return for being good
- don't judge or live in fear of judgment
- don't expect others to make you feel loved

You are not on the path when you…

- feel numb and traumatized
- feel valued for what you do, not for who you are
- live on distorted beliefs
- fail to love and are too tired to try again
- have given up your passion for life in the belief that you have no dreams left inside of you (a result of loving enthusiasm after repeated failure)

Love bath/hydrotherapy:

Make the power of heat and cold part of your regimen. By alternating the use of hot and cold water, your body will undergo the following:

Hot bath—increased blood flow, circulation, metabolism, pulse rate, lymph function, relaxation of muscles.

Cold bath or shower—analgesic effect (the release of prostaglandin, a pain-relief substance), shock effect which causes deep inhalation of breath, prevention of muscle damage, reduction of inflammation.

Steps:

Alternate three times between a hot bath (5 minutes) then a cold shower or pour pails of chilled water on your body. This guarantees optimum healing and emotional detoxification, too!

In this season of love, allow the path to open up before you. And in Chopra's words, "To exist within love's full, unbridled power is terrifying unless you have walked the path to love in complete devotion to the very end."

Love and light!

Source: "The Path To Love" by Dr. Deepak Chopra

More on beauty, wellness and fulfillment in the "Cory Quirino Show" on Studio 23, Wednesdays, 11:30 p.m.

Tummy-friendly, lactose-free milk

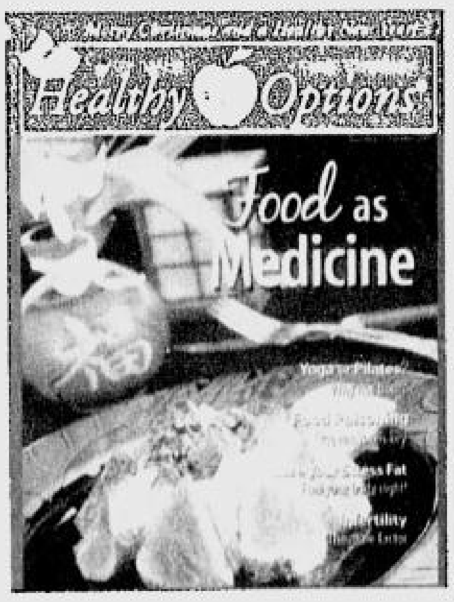
DO you experience stomach discomfort when drinking milk? If you get gas, cramps, diarrhea or flatulence when consuming milk, you are among the 90 percent of Asians who are lactose intolerant.

Lactose intolerance is the intestine's inability to digest lactose—the predominant sugar in all dairy products. The enzyme lactase is the one responsible for breaking down lactose into simple sugars that the body can digest, and lactose-intolerant people have insufficient amounts of this enzyme, hence, the inability to digest milk properly.

Lactose intolerance is inherited. Symptoms may appear in children as young as 3-4 years old or they may not be noticed until you're in your 70s. Lastly, lactose intolerance is present among all ages, from infants to seniors. However, as we grow older, our lactose intolerance increases.

There are ways to get your calcium without drinking milk, but natural is always best. Imagine being able to drink a tall, cold glass of milk with freshly baked cookies! Fortunately, there is Harvey Fresh Lactose-Free Milk which allows you to enjoy the high protein and calcium of milk—minus the stomach discomfort.

Exclusively distributed by Sermasison Corp., Harvey Fresh Lactose-Free Milk is available at all major supermarkets nationwide.

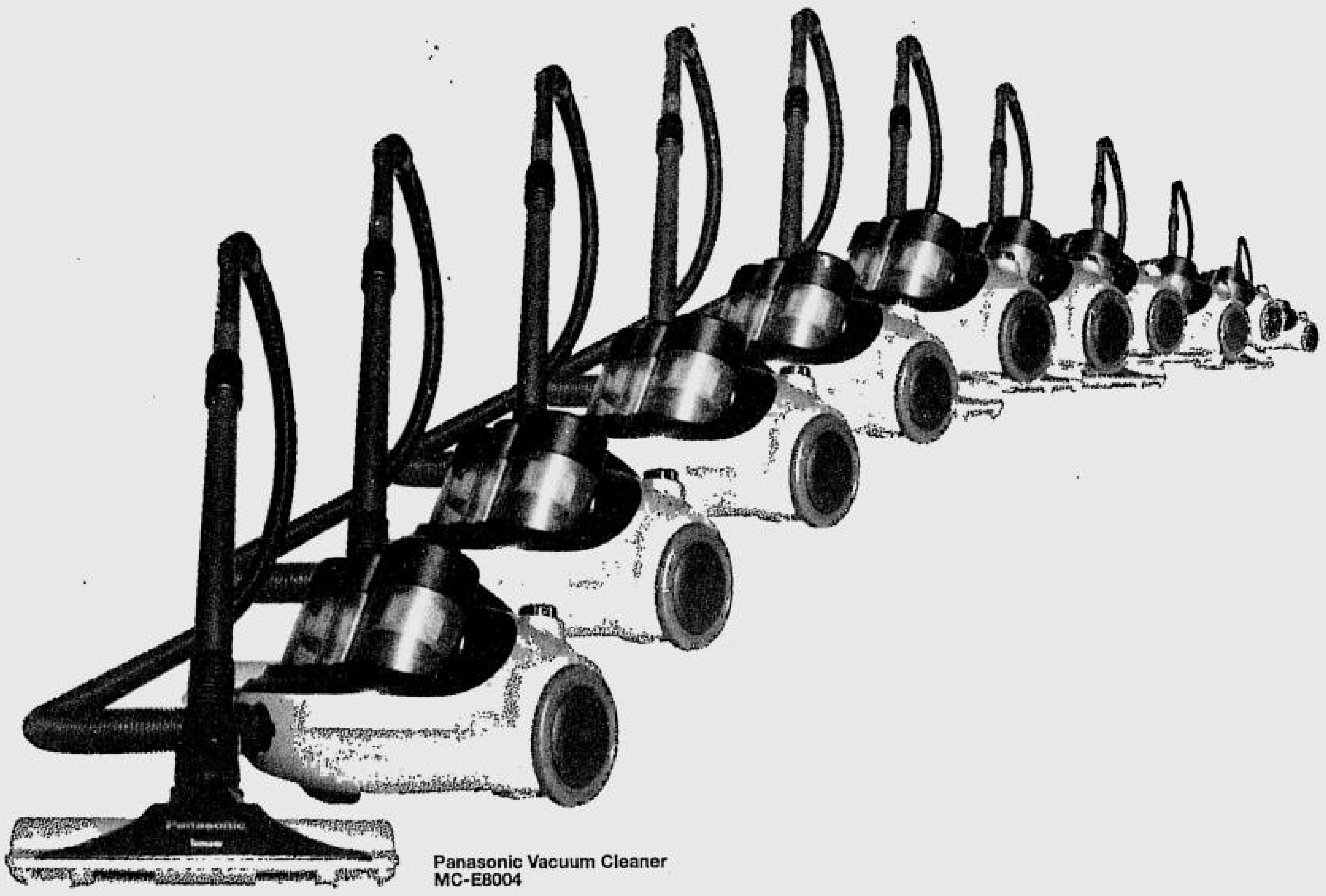


CHRISTMAS ISSUE OF NEWSDIGEST

The latest Healthy Options newsdigest features various informative articles on food as medicine, food poisoning, yoga and Pilates as exercise, infertility and stress. The newsdigest is given free to regular customers and published by Healthy Options Inc.

The Switch is On!

Sweeps Off Dust, Wipes Out Bacteria.



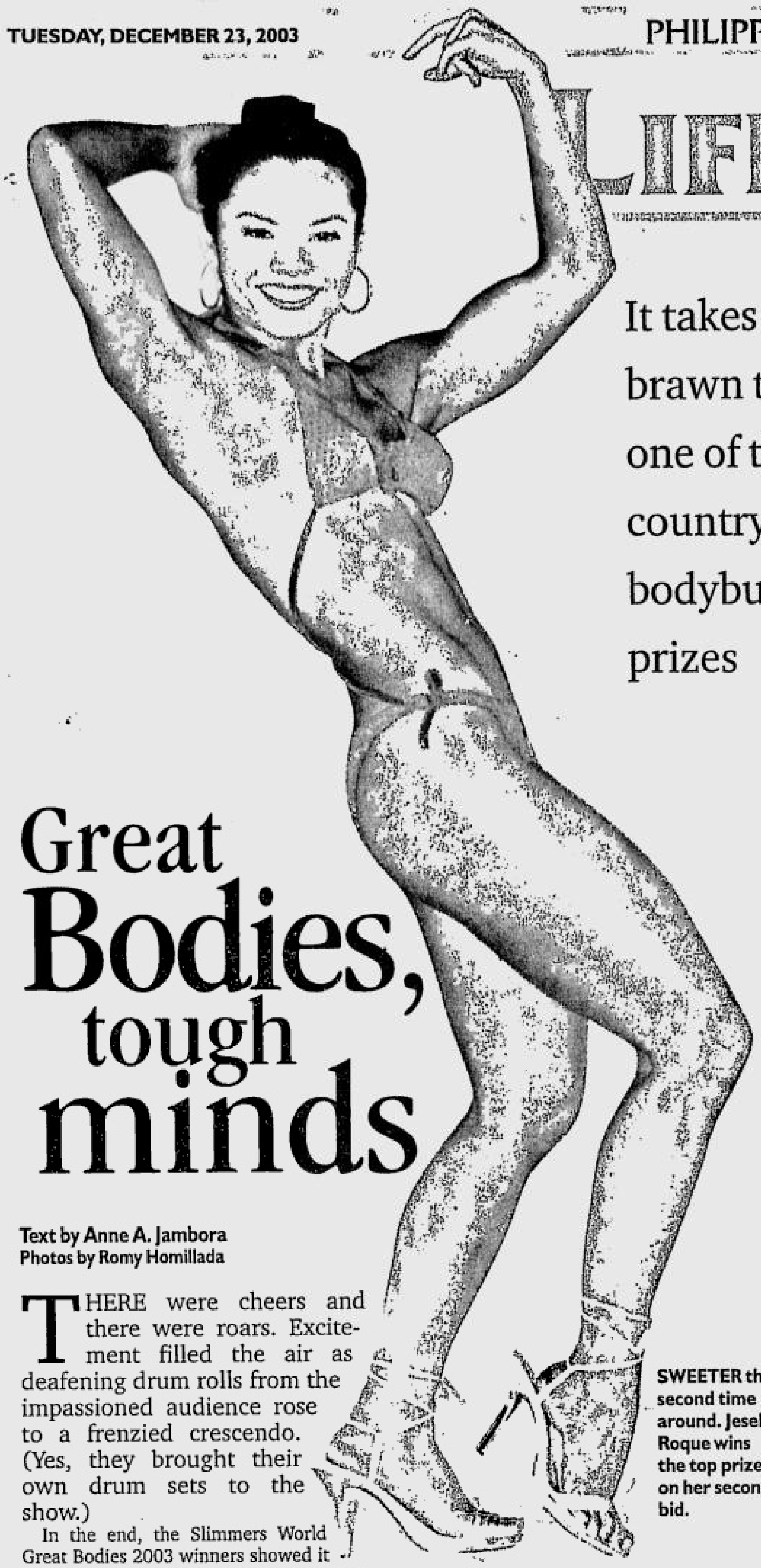
Panasonic Vacuum Cleaner
MC-E8004

Powerful Dust Collection
Its Ionizer Nozzle powerfully captures the smallest dust particles that other vacuum cleaners leave behind.

Double Dustbin System
This powerful yet compact design uses centrifugal sucking action for higher dust capacity and longer suction power.

HEPA Filter Exhaust
Its built-in HEPA Filter removes 99.97% of particles and bacteria for a healthier environment.

Panasonic
ideas for life



It takes more than brawn to snag one of the country's coveted bodybuilding prizes

CROWD favorite Rudolfo Go won Mr. Great Skin

Great Bodies, tough minds

Text by Anne A. Jambora
Photos by Romy Homillada

THERE were cheers and there were roars. Excitement filled the air as deafening drum rolls from the impassioned audience rose to a frenzied crescendo. (Yes, they brought their own drum sets to the show.)

In the end, the Slimmers World Great Bodies 2003 winners showed it took more than brawn to snag one of the country's coveted bodybuilding prizes.

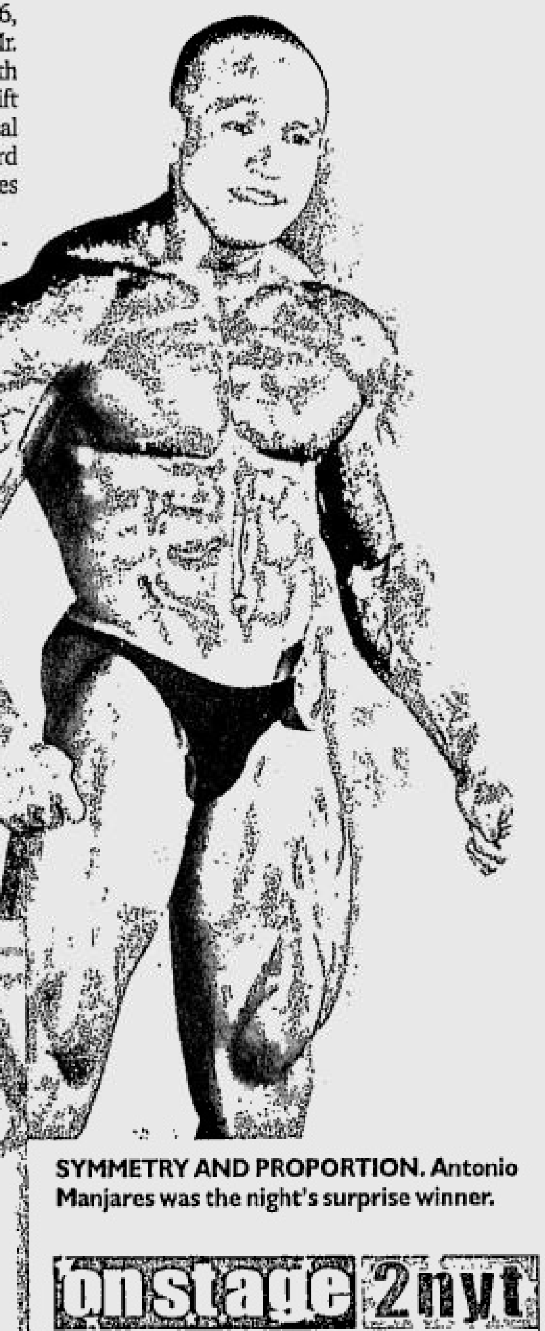
Antonio Manjares, 31, and Jesela Roque, 26, bested 16 other contestants to win the titles Mr. and Miss Great Body, and each went home with P100,000 cash prize and P100,000 worth of gift certificates from Slimmers World International (SWI). While both undoubtedly had rock-hard but lean physiques, the toughest challenges were never physical.

"Exercise, discipline and diet come naturally to me now," says Manjares, who has been seriously hitting the gym since 1999. He says nonchalantly that practicing his aero routine is more taxing than rigorous hours spent at the gym that drain him mentally at the end of the day. As a dance instructor, Manjares acknowledges though that a burly man like him doesn't look good jumping up and down the stage—much more dancing.

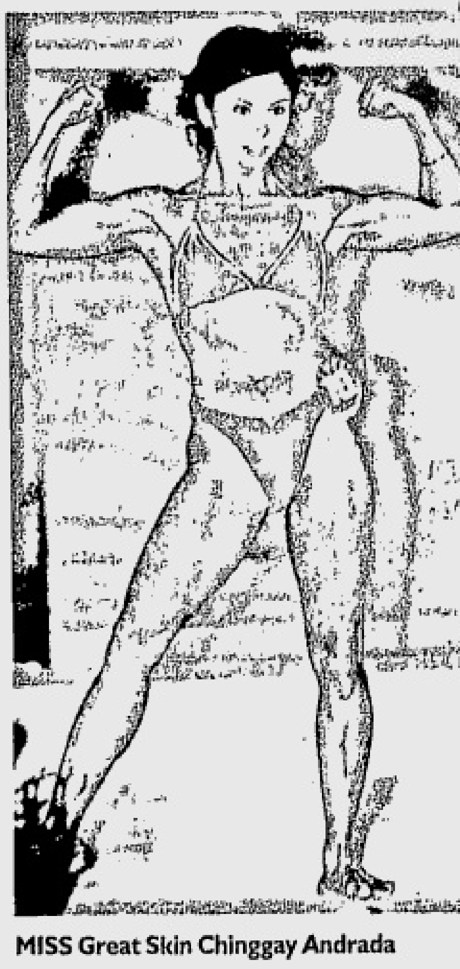
Although he has previously joined other bodybuilding competitions, Manjares reluctantly joined Great Bodies after constant prodding from the SWI-SM City branch manager. "I didn't prepare that long for the competition since I thought I would never win," he says. Great Bodies, Manjares says, has always

GREAT/ D3

SWEETER the second time around. Jesela Roque wins the top prize on her second bid.



SYMMETRY AND PROPORTION. Antonio Manjares was the night's surprise winner.



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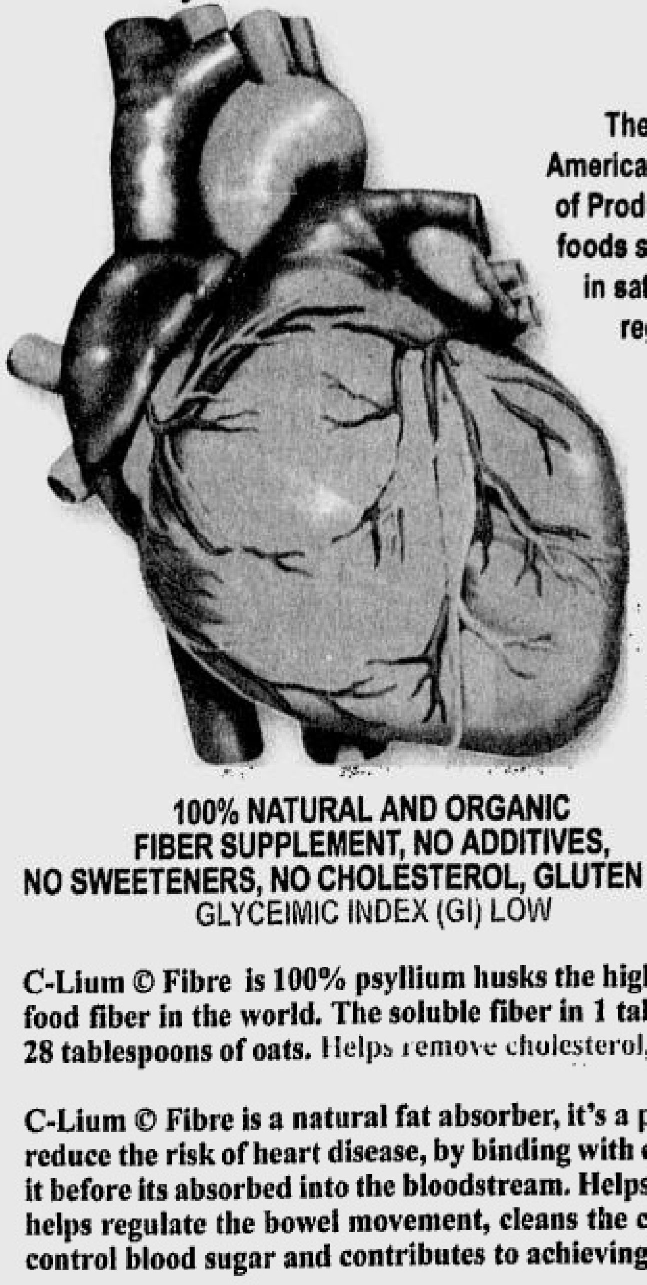

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Thailand reveals its 'unseen treasures'

AN EARLY lesson in caring

By Alex Y. Vergara

Farm Chokchai boasts of sophisticated breeding and milking facilities

AND we thought black-and-white Holstein cows could be found only in Holland and New Zealand.

Horseback-riding cowboys in Thailand's Farm Chokchai have been raising them and other farm animals we once thought only thrived in temperate countries for a little over two decades now.

As part of Thailand's Unseen Treasures, a campaign to promote tourism beyond Bangkok, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and Thai Airways International arranged a tour of the lower northeastern portion of the country also known as the I-san region.

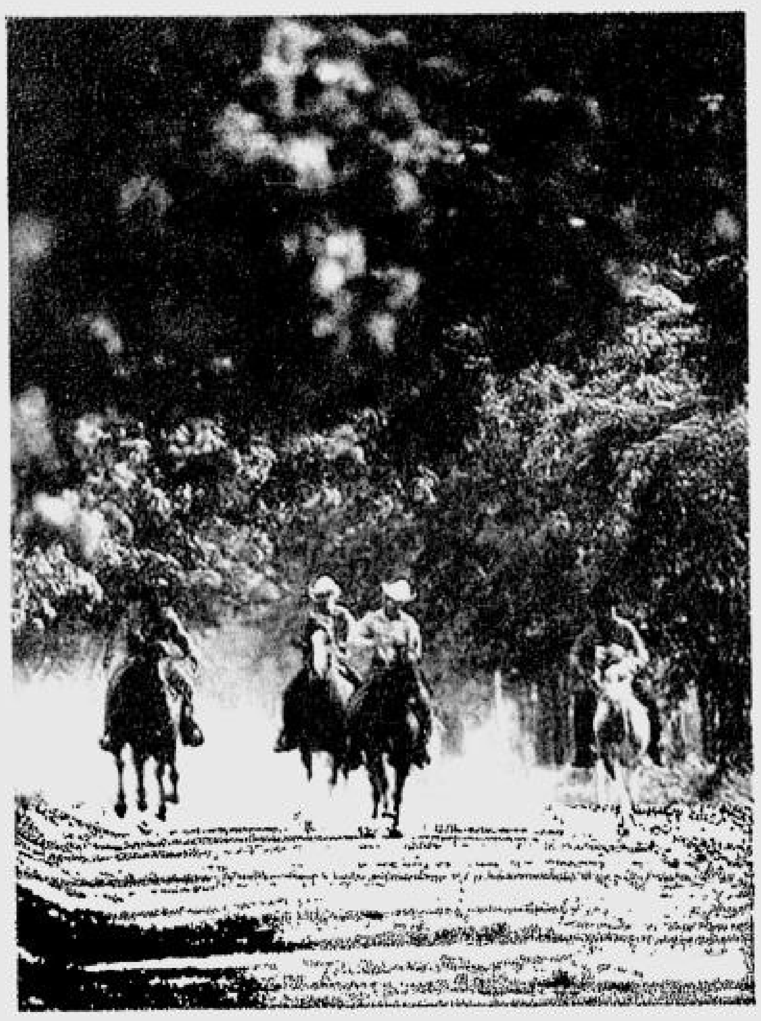
Unseen Treasures continues what the Amazing Thailand campaign began. The old campaign, launched in 1998, is still in place in some European countries.

"This new campaign aims to supplement the old one as it (encourages) both tourists and locals alike to explore Thailand beyond such popular destinations as Bangkok and Phuket," said David de Jesus, TAT's marketing representative in the Philippines.

Among the highlights of the trip were visits to the 8,000-acre Farm Chokchai, Phimai Historical Park and Khao Yai National Park, all located in the province of Nakorn Ratchasima (also known as Korat). Although the attractions are several hours apart, newly built flyovers, freeways and main roads sometimes as wide as Edsa make travel a breeze even in the Thai countryside.

COWGIRL briefs visitors at Farm Chokchai

LEARNING to milk by hand



COWBOYS, Thailand-style

HOP aboard the wagons

Of course, the two-day swing in the northeast also gave shopaholic Filipinos several shopping opportunities in the night market in Korat (it seems every city in Thailand has at least one), silk village in Pak Thong Chai and pottery village at Dan Kwan.

"We know that wherever Filipinos go, they'll always find the time to shop," said de Jesus. "That's why we always include shopping in Bangkok as part of every package we offer."

But there's more to shopping in I-san as families, history buffs and adventurous backpackers will discover.

Located 150 kilometers northeast of Bangkok or one hour and 40 minutes away by car, Farm Chokchai (www.farmchokchai.com) will surely appeal to families, especially those with small children.

A tour of the dairy farm on tractor-drawn wagons that takes a little over two hours includes stops at such activities and attractions as an animal show, petting zoo and horseback riding in a makeshift cowboy town. Women in the group were drawn to a section of the land planted to sunflowers. Alas, none of the wagons stopped there.

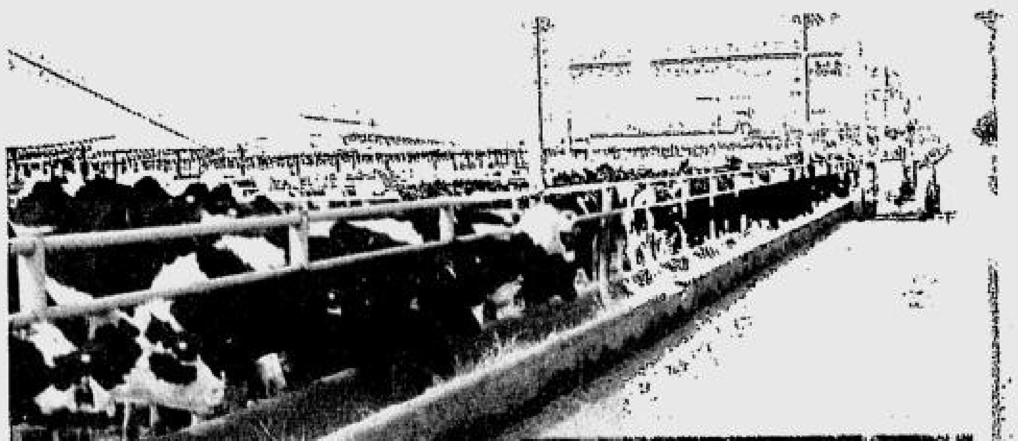
But the most amazing and inspiring aspect about the farm is how, from humble beginnings, it became one of the biggest and most modern dairy farms in Southeast Asia with 5,000 heads of cattle.

Founder Chokchai Bulakul, after earning a degree in animal husbandry from the United States, began operating a 100-acre farm devoted to raising native cows. The farm grew steadily, even becoming in 1965 the largest in Southeast Asia with more than 12,000 heads of cattle.

A crisis, which later proved to be a blessing, forced Farm Chokchai to diversify in 1979. Due to export quotas imposed on beef, the farm expanded its operations to include research and breeding development for the production of high-quality milk. Its pioneering efforts paid off in 1985 when it launched its pasteurized milk via door-to-door delivery.

Thus, a trip to Farm Chokchai wouldn't be complete without a trip to its clean, state-of-the-art breeding and milking facilities. Women tour guides dressed in cowgirl outfits brief visitors on the facilities, while farm personnel demonstrate how to milk cows by machine and by hand. Some visitors get the chance to milk the cows manually.

A visit to what is actually a demo version of the dairy plant in a big, antiseptic room, culminates in taste testing. Guests help themselves to ice cream aptly called Umm! Those hankering for steaks (after seeing all those cute, innocent-looking cows) can satisfy their craving at the Chokchai Steakhouse.



SOUTHEAST Asia's biggest dairy farm

FUN with other animals

Located close to the Cambodian border, Korat is proud of its own Buddhist temple, the centuries-old Prasat Hin Phimai considered a smaller replica of the neighboring country's historic and celebrated Angkor Wat.

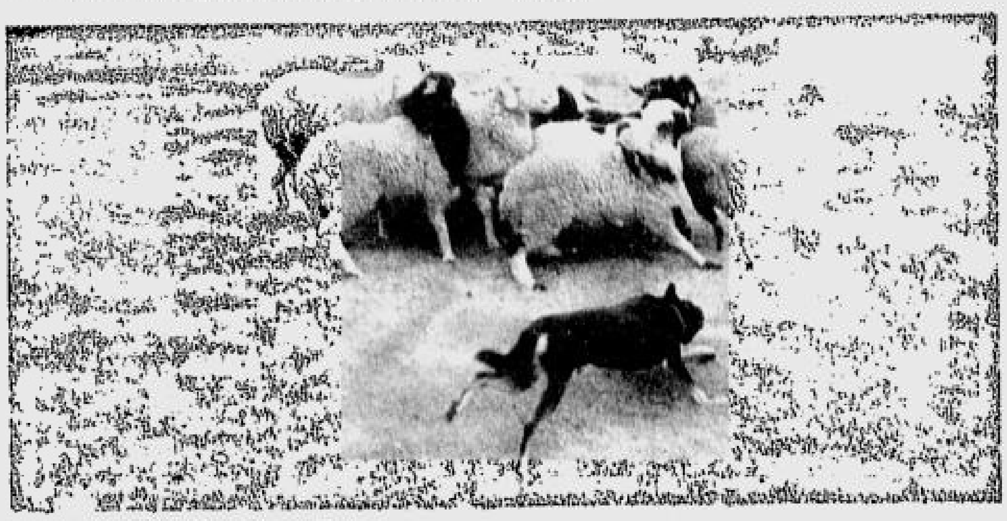
Tourists hankering for the great outdoors can go backpacking, hiking and white-water rafting in the Khao Yai National Park.

If they're lucky, they might, like the Filipino group, come across a deer or two that freely roam the vast reserve. Just steer clear of the few remaining tigers, okay?

"There's currently a limited market for these places," said de Jesus. "We're now exploring areas within the I-san provinces that would appeal to certain market segments in the Philippines." Whatever the attractions are, there's definitely more to Thailand than Bangkok's night markets and infamous red-light district.

Call Thai Airways International at 8124812 or 8124744, and the Tourism Authority of Thailand at 9277780.

E-mail the author at avergara@inquirer.com.ph



THE ONLY animal missing is Babe

How to achieve healthy skin

LUSH'S best-selling skin care sets a new standard in natural beauty with its new range of cleansers, toners and moisturizers.

To celebrate its successful first year, Helen Ambrosen, Lush product creator, offers beauty tips for maintaining a flawless complexion.

Exfoliate

Exfoliation keeps skin stimulated and working at its peak. Those with skin problems and overactive sebaceous glands can exfoliate daily, while sensitive skin has to be treated once a week. The skin should be treated gently. Using an exfoliator on damp or lubricated skin will help avoid any dragging. Don't grind products into your skin.

Use not just a blend of exfoliators but also skin softeners.

Ocean's Salt (P395) is a stimulating foaming facial wash with a polishing action. Formulated with fresh lime and fresh grapefruit infusion, seaweed and granules of sea salt, it also contains Shea butter and cocoa butter to moisturize and combat the astringent properties of citrus ingredients.

Sweet Japanese Girl (P325) is an exceptionally emollient exfoliator made with cocoa butter, Shea butter, palm kernel oil and a blend of antiseptic oils for very congested skin.

Cleanse and tone

It's a cardinal beauty sin not to clean the face and remove all traces of makeup. Changes in temperature can cause skin to overcompensate through the production of sebum. Never use anything that leaves skin thirsty. If the skin feels sore or taut after using a product, stop using it. Lush's Ultrabland (P325) is excellent for all skin types and is a gentle deep cleanser that softens and helps keep moisture in.

Lush's Baby Face (P195) is a cleanser that revolutionizes deep cleansing. It's made from a blend of light oils similar to the skin's own so it lifts off excess sebum and leaves skin soft and plumped up. The blend of essential oils of narcissus and tangerine help balance sebum production and promote healthy skin.

Eau Rome (P295), as toner, has balancing lavender.

Moisturize

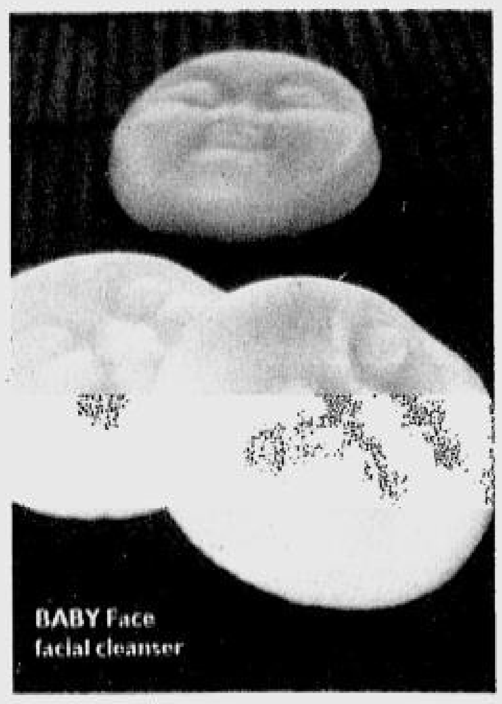
Lush's moisturizers not only put much needed moisture into the skin, but also help skin maintain its water balance. They also make the skin feel comfortable. The moisturizers contain organic cold pressed vegetable oils as well as vegetable butters.

Lush's Afterlife (P1,150) is good for cold weather. Honey is extremely calming and helps reduce redness and soreness. Fresh organic mangoes are rich in skin-friendly vitamins and antioxidants.

Skin's Shangri La (P1,450) has a rich but light texture and with excellent rejuvenating and re-mineralizing properties leaving the skin plumped up and soft.

Lush is exclusively distributed by Stores Specialists, Inc. Lush boutiques are located at Glorietta 4, Greenbelt 3, Power Plant Mall and Shangri-La Plaza Mall. Visit www.lush.com.ph

SKIN'S Shangri-La facial moisturizer



BABY Face facial cleanser

TEA TREE WATER
BREEZE IN A SEA AIR
EAU ROMA WATER

TEA Tree Water, Breeze on a Sea Air and Eau Roma Water facial toners

Great . . .

From page D1

favored "leaner" men, or those who excelled in aero competition. Bulky guys like him virtually have no chance of winning, he adds.

But a competition is a competition, and looking good, especially in this type of challenge, is of paramount importance. He did "crash" training a month-and-a-half away from the finals, going on a strict daily diet of two kilos of camote and two kilos of chicken breast. "I hope after my surprise win, that many bodybuilders will start to join Great Bodies," he says.

Confidence

"I wanted to prove something to myself, that I can do anything as long as I set my mind on it," says Roque, PBA sportscaster/courtside reporter. She says working out helped her develop her self-confidence, allowing her to shed the image of the shy and insecure teenager. She unabashedly says she was regularly given guy roles in high school plays at the St. Scholastica's College for the simple reason that she was, in her words, "flat" and "straight."

Simply put, she wasn't—and still isn't—most people's idea of the voluptuous quintessential femme fatale. "We always want that Miss World type of body, but not all of us have it. And genetically speaking, not all of us ever will. Joining this competition made me appreciate myself, my body, that there are good points to it as well," she says.

Like Manjares, Roque says the mental challenges are the hardest to beat. She had to juggle her tight schedule as a reporter with her workout routine of three hours six times a week for three months, and endure the most boring, horrible-tasting diet ever.

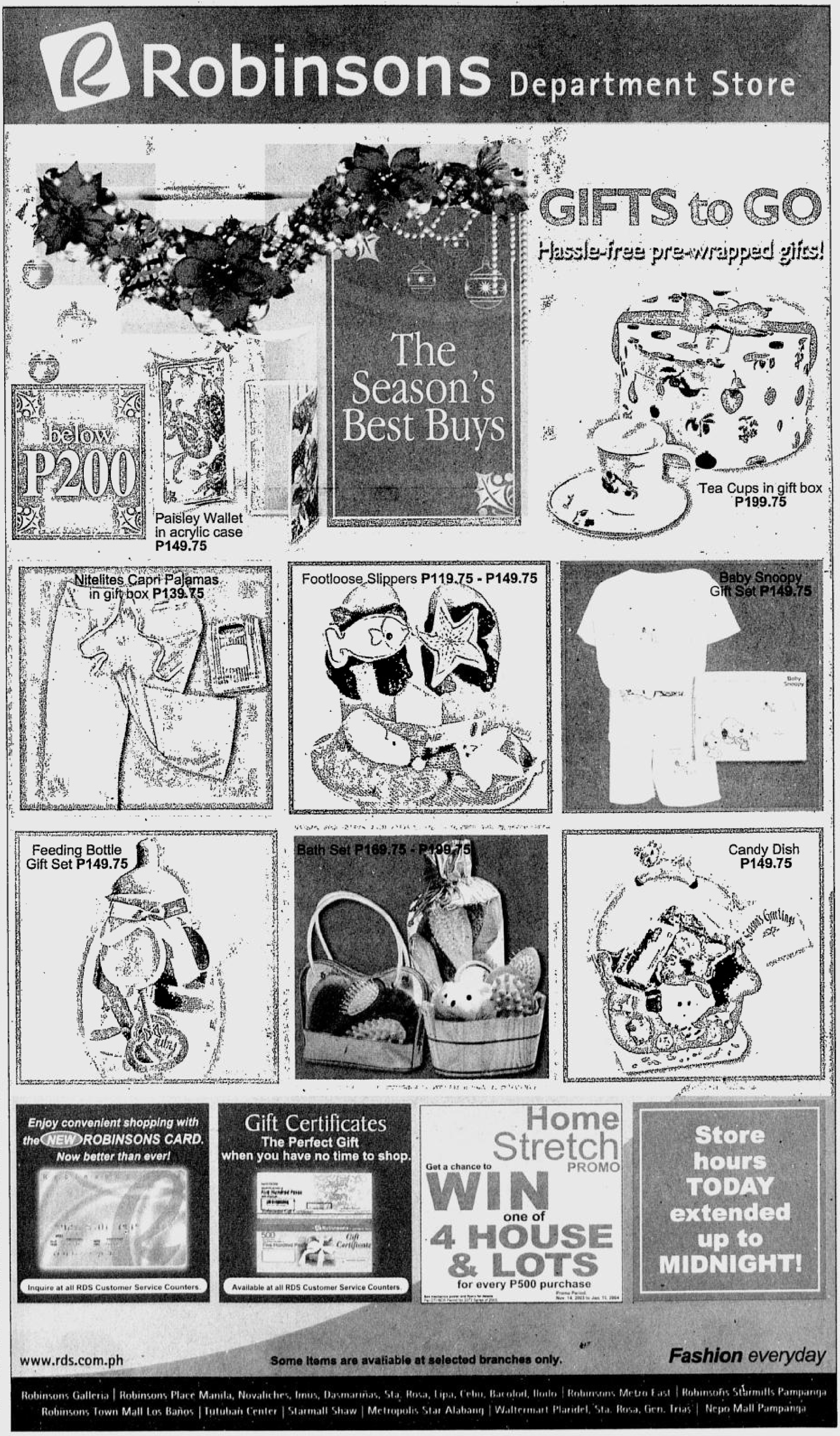
If you don't understand why mental toughness is necessary, try eating the same meal every day for months. Try eating tuna in water (among other "edibles"), drained till it is dry as pulp, day in and day out, and you'll probably want to strangle the next person you come across.

"The physical part was easy," she says. Really? Well, she does admit crying during her sessions with her physical trainer, especially when working out her abs and legs. But, compared to the mental part of the preparation, she'd take on the physical anytime.

As of press time, Roque finally had her first slice of cake and bar of chocolate, and was out shopping with her mom. Manjares has also started to relax and has let in the holiday spirit. Christmas is catching up fast with the both of them, but the titles they won and the responsibilities they entail have yet to fully sink in, they admit.

Also given were special awards: Mr. and Miss Great Skin, Rudolfo Go and Chinggay Andrada; Best in Talent, Jerome Salvado and Bess Regler; and Mr. and Miss Photogenic, Randall Lim and Jesela Roque.

E-mail the author at ajambora@inquirer.com.ph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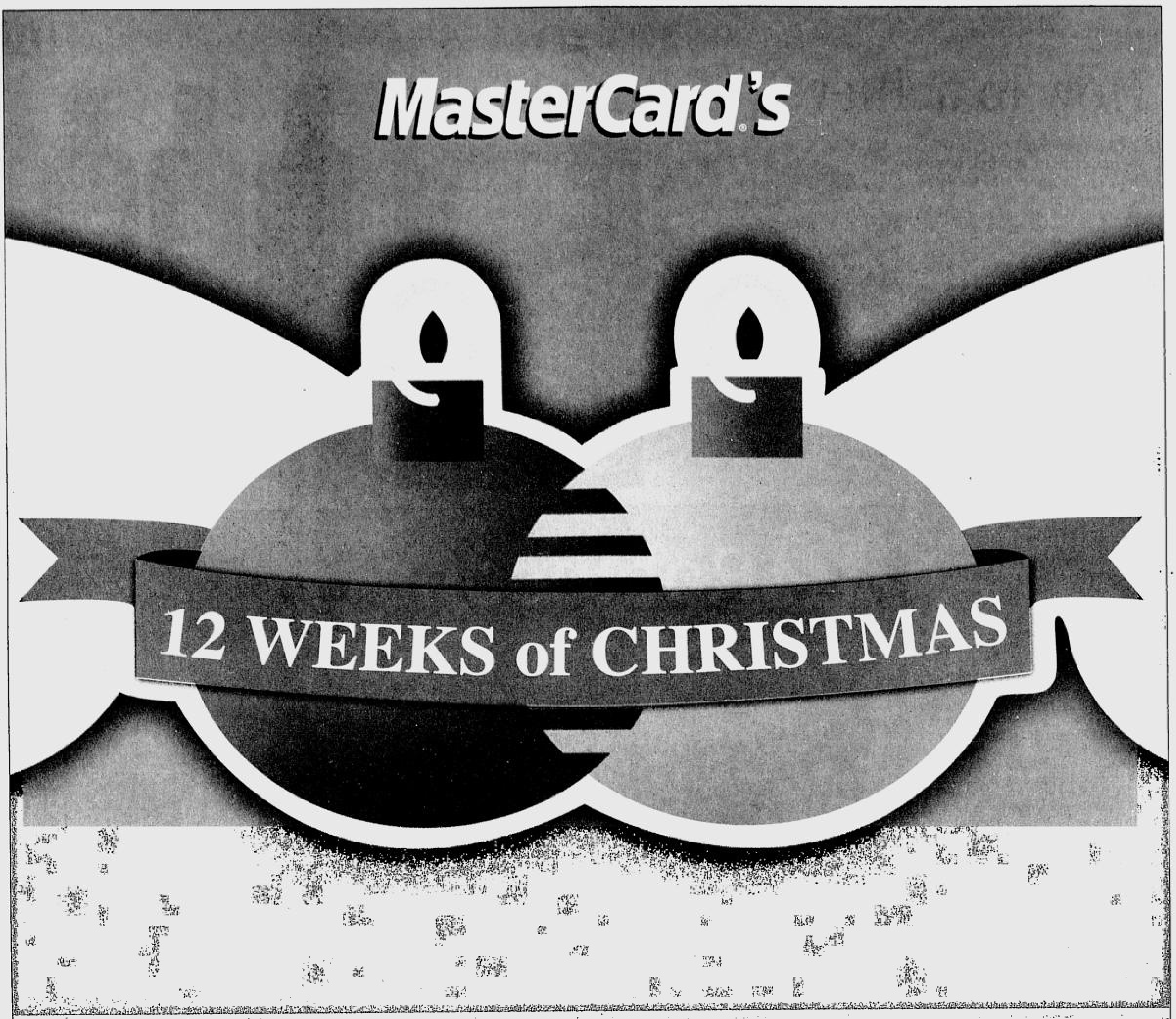

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